





PROFESSOR
How *Could*
You!

BY HARRY LEON WILSON

OH, DOCTOR!
SO THIS IS GOLF
THE BOSS OF LITTLE ARCADY
THE LIONS OF THE LORD
MA PETTENGILL
MERTON OF THE MOVIES
RUGGLES OF RED GAP
SOMEWHERE IN RED GAP
THE SPENDERS
THE WRONG TWIN
THE MAN FROM HOME
(In collaboration with Booth Tarkington)
THE GIBSON UPRIGHT
(In collaboration with Booth Tarkington)

Professor

How Could You!

A NOVEL

BY
HARRY LEON WILSON

AUTHOR OF "OH, DOCTOR!"
"MERTON OF THE MOVIES," ETC.



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How *Could*
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Professor How *Could* You!



CHAPTER I

NOW that my affairs are brought again to a good posture I am looking back on the strange adventures of a time called by a colleague—a cheap fellow thinking himself a wit—my impromptu sabbatical. The perils I braved, the tumults I survived, have already frozen to the fixity of a map in relief, so that their contours may be traced by remembering finger tips in all safety—since there can be no shifting to a new confusion. And in this security I am conscious of a lifting elation. I hope I may not become merely smug, but not again, I fancy, will certain associates traduce me as one fossilized, dry-and-dusty, aloof-from-life. Not again, I believe, will one of this envious cabal—the would-be wit whom in kindness I shall not name—report the theory of my teaching to be that history ceased abruptly and forever with the Renaissance.

True, certain student groups of Fairwater yet dub me Old Red Sandstone, a term quaintly lifted from geology and suggested partly, it is possible, by my still reddish beard, partly, I dare say, by the surname Coplestone. Yet this sobriquet bears no longer the rude

implication of belatedness that once burdened it. I have become timely. I have been called, admiringly, a bearcat.

Not yet without emotion can I recall the memorable morning when I again took up my scholastic labors in the ivied east wing of Fairwater. What my appearance aroused was a demonstration—no less. The instant I was spied on the campus I heard an approving undergraduate shout of "That is a boy!" and with this cry I was freed of all misgiving due to the knowledge that a perversely garbled version of my wanderings had become current. Twice again I heard this cordial "That is a boy!" and, once within the walls of Fairwater, other acclamations rang through the corridor; trifling words a man of my age and dignity should perhaps not have taxed his mind to remember. "He is all right," shouted a leader, and promptly came a concerted demand from two score young throats, "Who is all right?" to be followed by the lusty chorus, "Old Red Sandstone—he is all right!" Caps were tossed on this climax, and individuals in the throng would confirm it with "I will say that he is" or, with an even fiercer intensity of corroboration, "I will tell the world that he is!"

Doubtless—let it be said again—I should not have treasured this puerile banter, yet I must concede that it left me profoundly affected. I was fearful, indeed, that my device of simulating preoccupation to hide how greatly I was moved would not avail. When, once, I decided to let a faint smile indicate that I felt no real displeasure at this rough cordiality I was glad of my protecting beard, for I found my lips weak.

Nor did the frenzy—I may call it that—of acclama-

tion cease as I made a way to my desk. "Ah, you sheik!" I caught, or the interjection may have been "Oh"—incited doubtless by a rumor that I had braved certain dangers on the great American desert. As I turned to face the class a final tribute reached me, "Is not he wondrous!"—or "a wonder!" as the boyish phrase may have been, to be met by the fervent confirmation, this time quaintly varied to "I will tell the cock-eyed world that he is."

Once I should have shrunk from this familiar approach. Now, having mingled with my kind as man to man, I will confess that I basked in it. And a pretty while I was compelled, by my quite preposterous emotion, to stand there falsely seeming to muse upon certain aspects of the Saxon heptarchy which would form the substance of my morning's lecture. It had been a great and gracious tumult, and under these—secretly to me—delightful auspices were my duties resumed.

It is perhaps needless to say that I am resolved never again to abandon my station in life for—as my satirist has been charmed to put it—a semester of subslumming. That circumstances will crouch in wait for me, I doubt not, but I have had my fling, as the phrase goes, and am armed against their blandishments. The gipsy strain that finally wrought upon me I must suppose to have been mine from birth, as also that unconsidering, mad, black passion to show myself in my true colors not alone to the world but to my wife, Mrs. Carinthia Copplestone. That I governed this evil impulse a long period of years is an item to my credit, offsetting, one may hope, many later peccancies, as I now frankly de-

scribe them. It is true that this early restraint would never condone the rank moral obliquity a vulgarian press has imputed to me, yet such a burden seems not to be laid upon my past good behavior; at least not by Mrs. Copplestone, though I cannot deny that she suffers moods in which she is enigmatic. She will smile an apparent acceptance of my protestations, but the lifted lip goes too closely over her perfect teeth with a thinning effect—I know not how else to put it—leaving a perfunctory grimace behind which doubt seems to lurk. Is she not, then, persuaded of my innocence, or would she merely have me think she is not? From my knowledge of this in many respects admirable woman I am certain she will guard the secret to her tomb.

And yet I cannot bring myself to believe that in her secret heart of hearts Mrs. Copplestone does actually asperse that woman of sterling attributes to whom the anonymous news rat applied the odious term “love mate” in connection with a name which, as she is aware, I chanced at the time to be using for my own. Full well she knows, too, that the prophesied legal proceeding, denominated in the hideous press jargon a “heart-balm suit,” with myself most disparagingly involved, was but a figment of obscene and malignant imagining.

Nor can I feel that she believes me to have been culpably involved with another, a theater woman, that strange Vera of the careless, wicked look, even though our enlivening association became intimate to a point where the paltry-minded, and perhaps envious, might warrantably have pointed the finger of suspicion. I have explicitly made known to Mrs. Copplestone that Vera and I were simply good pals, as Vera herself more

than once put it. I have not withheld from her that the woman from our first dramatic encounter addressed me as Pop, but I have again and again pointed out that this of itself indicates the propriety of our relationship, it being but a friendly diminutive of the term "Father." Mrs. Coppleson may discredit me with conduct unbecoming an educator of my years and standing, but I believe her to be—at least secretly—persuaded that, aside from my quite inadvertent connivance with certain dastardly lawbreakers, my life while away was, in the deepest sense, morally blameless; that I was never flatly dissolute, never the miscreant, during a time that fate put me beyond the minute personal supervision which she had never failed to exert since the beginning of our wedded life some thirty years ago.

What I feel to be quite as important for the calm of our future years, she no longer believes that I wandered from my home in a fit of mental aberration. Long stubbornly fixed in this delusion, she is now assured that I left deliberately and with a sound mind. She knows that an errant gipsy strain prevailed over settled habits and—I feel free to call it so—the abject docility to which her domineering temperament had reduced me. Moreover, she now suspects that the vagabond in me may become resurgent under provocation. At times I detect her watching me furtively, as one might watch a tamed animal that has given signs of reverting to the ferine. More than once she has uttered, half jestingly, yet with a visible fraction of uneasy belief, the phrase "street angel, home devil." Not any more does she confront me with the mien of an offended empress should I venture to obey a whim or fancy peculiarly

my own. It is as if she, herself a mother of ferment, has divined that I am compounded of volatile juices and am, in the common phrase, not too unlikely to cause trouble under adverse pressure.

That I feel for her in the disquiet she thus suffers all the sympathy a right-minded man should feel, I shall not profess. Not all the calamities nor the good fortunes of my respite have sufficed to erase certain painful memories of that last month before I left, during which this, in the main, excellent woman waged with every masculine trick of chicanery her wretchedly successful campaign for the mayoralty of our thriving little city of Fairwater, into whose well-nigh cloistered homes, alas! had crept the envenomed doctrine of woman's political equality. Not so soon can I forget the shock it was to find my wife referred to in the public prints as, merely, Copplesstone—to read that Copplesstone affirmed this or denied the other, that Copplesstone predicted an overwhelming victory for the forces of righteous government. It can hardly be guessed with what a curious sensation this left me; disembodied, unmanned, unsexed—I know not how else to say it. Easier to convey my reactions to certain all-too-vivid campus epithets that bloomed about the college—I could not but be aware—from teachers, deans, students; such atrocious locutions as Cloud-Compelling Carinthia, The Red Hussar, The Mad Mullah, The Grenadier, and Iron Hand; this last with a shaft of the invidious for myself. Need I say that such infelicities cast a pall over my every—until that last day—innocent enjoyment of life?

Nor does Mrs. Copplesstone, in common with a cer-

tain professorial clique, longer consider me a dusty survival, oblivious of the swift flow of contemporary life. She knows I have survived contacts that enlightened, even though they shocked. She knows I have descended into depths from which she would shrink back affrighted, depths where rough men use commonly and freely the vilest imprecations. She knows I emerged from this ordeal not only unscathed but with a handsome sum of money gained by my foresight and cold precision of judgment in matters where she had supposed me impractical. She knows, in a word, that I have learned to live my own life, and may do so again if put to it.

Our changed attitudes may be best indicated, perhaps, by a trifling incident. Half an hour ago Cato, my sleek white cat, approached Pudgkins, the lap dog of Mrs. Copplesstone, with a series of hissing threats that I found laughable, drove her whimpering from the cushion she occupied, and extended his own beautiful length upon it as if nothing had happened. Mrs. Copplesstone not only observed the incident but made no outcry. Formerly Cato would have been ejected from the house. Now he is immune from her persecutions. The circumstance is eloquent.

Nor is there any reference now to what Mrs. Copplesstone had come to call my little articles for the so-called Sunday supplement of a Chicago sheet devoted to the sensational. Well she knows I would no longer submit to have my name appended to those atrocious garblings of history. Perhaps she divines that my resentment in this matter had its part in determining what she will still speak of as my mad behavior.

The truth is I was tricked in the matter of these articles, though little did I suspect to what lengths when she first urged me to write for the Sunday supplement so called.

I need not say what I did at last write in order to silence her importunities. I will merely state that those who know me could guess it to have been not only scholarly but dignified. What was my horror, then, to be confronted on a Sunday morning with black treachery. Either Mrs. Coppleson or some cheap fellow in the newspaper office had betrayed me into absurdities, uttered under my name and under a portrait of me taken some twenty years before. Was Homer illiterate? ran the astounding headline, followed by Noted Educator Hints Blind Poet Could Neither Read Nor Write.

The article itself was flippant, superficial, altogether base. I had said that the question of whether writing was known in the time of Homer had been raised in antiquity and been debated with especial eagerness after the appearance of Wolf's *Prolegomena*. I had then pointed out that the only passage in Homer which could be interpreted as a reference to writing occurred in the story of Bellerophon, told by Glaucus in the sixth book of the *Iliad*. Proteus, king of Corinth, sent Bellerophon to his father-in-law, the king of Lycia, and gave him "baneful tokens—scratching on a folded tablet many spirit-destroying things, and bade him show this to his father-in-law that he might perish." I added that we might suppose tokens between guest friends to have been in use before writing was known. And on this foundation had been built a struc-

ture of scandal and innuendo that revolted every fiber of my being. I was made to say that Homer, banished by Plato from his republic, would today undoubtedly be classed as a paranoiac; that there is no morality in him; that acts are not classified as good or bad, right or wrong; cruel and treacherous deeds being spoken of with no hint that they deserve censure. An added infamy was the illustration of the screed, in which a crudely drawn caricature of myself seemed about to explore the brain of Homer with a scalpel. Language is indeed a faulty instrument to express what I felt when this sheet was exposed to me by the delighted Mrs. Coplestone with more than that usual self-approval which is among her personality defects.

Too late did I then recall that I had, at her repeated urging, given her a sheaf of notes on Sappho, the Greek woman poet. It was a chilling fear of what she might have made of these that, during the following week, when her fearful campaign for the mayoralty was at its height, seemed to excite me to a frenzy of desperation. I know that I was no longer myself on that day after the election, in which Mrs. Coplestone achieved her so-called triumph. Happily at that time she was rather ignoring me, merely directing that I appear at the reception she would hold late that afternoon.

Poignantly do I recall the moment of my leaving our home. In the kitchen Hilda, our harassed maid, cut triangles of bread for sandwiches, trimming the brown crust from each. In the drawing-room Mrs. Coplestone was arranging chairs and a few small tables in

groups that gave the place an air of expectancy. As I passed through the hall she paused, tapping one of her teeth with a pencil and, as at times she will, apparently debating her scene. Never had she seemed of a more commanding presence.

"Just a few of the big, broad, thinking women," she murmured half absently, and then to me, who had thought to glide out unobserved, "Oh, Algernon—the telephone is off; so would you mind stopping at Downey's and telling them to make it all vanilla cream instead of half lemon ice? That will be better, don't you think?"

That is like her, too—completing a sentence with "Don't you think?" She had no wish to know what I thought, nor would she expect more than the "Certainly" I gave her. She will even at times make the inquiry more pointed, as "Modern life is so complex, don't you think—or do you?" But she will not wait to know if you don't—or do. It will avail you nothing to disagree with her.

"Certainly," I said, and left her sliding a heavy armchair to the side of the largest table. I knew she saw herself filling this and facing her band of big, broad, thinking women, myself somewhere in the background, not conspicuously present, yet enough so to be known as a captive bound to her chariot.

I closed our door softly on this pernicious activity and passed down the concrete walk to the iron gate, which I am afraid I flung to with a defiant clang. This, however, would not be heard by Mrs. Copplestone. I queerly at the moment seemed to be acting in obedience to some unidentified stimulus. I walked

without conscious aim, yet knew that deep within me some unfamiliar instinct was assuming control. Outside our gate I looked up and down the quiet street. Maple Avenue is never more comely than in these first days of spring, when its rows of shading trees hold the first hints of green, and the lawns before its attractive houses are faintly emerald. It all seemed so peacefully in contrast with the home I had left, where politics would soon seethe or where Mrs. Copplestone would be asking her friends if they did not find modern life terribly complex.

I walked slowly on in the curious indecision I have remarked. I seemed to be moving with a purpose impelling enough yet far below my consciousness. In front of the Leffingwell house, next to ours, I felt constrained to pause. Wondering why I should have done this, I recalled that the Leffingwells were absent and the house closed. Its curtained windows stared blankly at the street. I thought of the peaceful, still rooms behind them, where this afternoon there would be no incessant treble of voices, no big, broad, thinking women, no clutter of chairs and sandwiches. It was a quiet house, a satisfactory tomb.

I strolled on, my mind still blank of any destination. At the end of Maple I was about to turn, I think, up College Avenue, and perhaps I would have strolled un harmfully through the university grounds, but as I paused I was hailed by Fergus Jessup, our professor of English, who beckoned me from his veranda. I ascended the steps and joined him for mere want of any definite aim.

"Come around to the side porch, Coppie," he urged

after we had exchanged greetings. And on the side porch I found that he had been sitting at a wicker table on which were two glasses and a bottle of sherry. "I was hoping someone would come along and have a nip of this stuff with me," he explained.

He is a man of my own age, but larger, with more personality, I should say—and he is on terms of familiarity with the student body that have often seemed questionable in taste. However, he is a good chap and just now glowed with friendliness, so that I had no heart to refuse him, though I have never cared for any sort of intoxicants.

He poured me a glass of his liquor and I praised it warmly, as he seemed to wish me to. We sipped our drink and chatted, principally of the election, just over, in which Mrs. Copplestone had triumphed. He was rather unpleasantly jocular about this, asking to know how it might feel to be the husband of a mayor. Then he picked up what I saw to be the Sunday supplement I have before spoken of, and remarked, "But you're coming on yourself, Coppie. Two weeks ago you dished up 'Thé blind man who dwells in rocky Chios' for the barbarous-speaking Carians of today who read Sunday papers, and now you've gone and slandered a lady I long have loved. Where you going to stop? Will you leave us no illusions? Will the Scamander be choked with slain ideals? For shame! you old he-gossip."

I was a bit nettled at this buffoonery, and reached for the sheet he held, only to find that brutal caricature of myself, this time pointing sternly at a half-dressed female in a wanton posture, under the shout-

ing headline, Noted Professor Pries Lid Off Sappho's Home Life. I was aghast, scarce having strength to read the next line, Scandal in Main Street, Lesbos. And this the result of my harmless notes, turned over to Mrs. Copplestone, such items as she might with a little industry have gleaned for herself! I felt a great rage possess me. I could not read the thing further. I never have read it.

I seized my glass and drained it, while Jessup continued to banter me in his rough way. "Ah, Coppie! You take that 'violet-weaving, pure, sweet-smiling Sappho,' and drag her name in the dirt. You plainly insinuate that as head of a poetic school she had more than a matronly regard for her pupils. You concede her gift of song, but have her abandoned to vice; distinguished among the corrupt community of Lesbos by exceptional immorality. I'm surprised at you, Coppie—the foulness of your mind, so to attack that lady, 'small and dark and flower-lovely,' merely because she painted passion so fervently. And now, of course, my affair with that enchantress is broken off; but do me a favor, Coppie—let Cleopatra alone, will you, there's a good chap? She is another jewel in my diadem of lonely amour, and she's already had enough said about her. Can't you be magnanimous and let her——"

"Look here, Jessup"—I was hotly inflamed by this badinage, my humiliation being already more than I wished to bear—"I was gulled into this——"

"There, there, old chap—I know, I know. Have another drink." And he poured my glass full, after which he reached over his large hand and patted my

shoulder not ungently. In my embarrassment I drank the liquor and recalled that it was Jessup, by all accounts, who had spoken of Mrs. Copplestone not only as The Mad Mullah but as Iron Hand. He refilled my glass before I could prevent him, and spoke more seriously. "I'll tell you, Coppie, I think our justly enraged president will put a spoke in her wheel after he sees this. Of course Fairwater is looking up; it is already being advertised as the college with a personal touch, turning out four-square men, and all that, but I doubt if this is the sort of notoriety it wants, even from its professor of history. You don't mind my saying it. Of course I know you want such hogwash stopped."

I was again embarrassed by this kindness. "She has wanted to get me out of a rut," was all I could offer.

He lifted his glass, waving it slightly to point his speech. "There's more than one way out of a rut," he submitted, and while he sipped his wine I tried to fathom his precise meaning. The speech had an invidious angle.

"If you mean," I retorted sharply, "that history itself is in a rut"—he waved a protest, but I kept on—"you must blame the hack writers who smugly reduce it to an outline. Imagine an outline of history! An outline of mathematics would be as supposable. Dash it! are we all to be reduced to outlines?" I was quite vexed.

"I dare say," replied Jessup. "The coming man will be only an outline; a formula—you'll be able to say him all in a dozen words." We were thus off the

immediate topic and my friend tactfully slid the Sunday horror to the floor where my ignominy would be less apparent. "It seems to be the trend of evolution," he went on. "As the herd becomes more dense its members must file down the sharp corners or let mere attrition do it. Only by becoming all alike can they avoid a discomfortable clashing. To be sure, a few of us struggle to preserve our differences. Here"—he reached for another sheet of the Sunday paper—"I found a cry in this poetry column that made echoes in me." He read intoningly, rather booming as he proceeded, fastening his eyes on mine after every phrase, as if to demand assent:

"I weary of this life,
So like a garden
Under cultivation."

There were other stanzas, concluding with:

I wish I were a bell,
That I might clang
A brazen tongue.

Jessup's eyes are prominent and they clung to mine almost indignantly, as if he were demanding his rights of me. I hastened to assure him that I, too, felt this urge to be out of the compliant herd, that I resented being caught in the stream of tendency that would make me an outline, a formula. We chatted at length about this, and time flew more swiftly than I was aware of. I remember telling my friend that I was still thrilled by certain old fashions of title, such as

Houtman's Company of Distant Countries, founded after he discovered the short way to Java, and above all by The Company of Gentleman Adventurers Trading into the Hudson's Bay Country.

"I would have liked that," I said, and was nettled when Jessup retorted, "Poor old Coppie! Why, man, you're only a toy balloon tugging at your string. How gaily you'd start if the string broke, but how little a way you'd get toward a distant country! You wouldn't last long without the string, old chap—your fun's all in the tugging."

I argued this and we diverted our talk into other channels until I presently remembered my instructions about the lemon ice. I begged the use of Jessup's telephone and told the man he was to send half lemon ice and half vanilla cream. He replied that he knew this and had already done it an hour before. As I hung up the receiver I recalled that I was to tell him the opposite, but it seemed useless now.

I went back to the porch, reflecting that Mrs. Copplestone would have another of those grievances against me so soon after one that had quite annoyed her. The week previous, she, being in the city with her sister, had written me to meet her there so that she might select a suit of clothes for me and some items of haberdashery. I had gone to the city as she desired and stopping at the news stand of the railway station on my way out had found a London quarterly I was especially eager for. Sitting on a bench for a moment to glance through it, I had become absorbed and a bit forgetful, I suppose, since I was still there when the hour arrived for my evening train to Fair-

water. I had the utmost difficulty in persuading Mrs. Copplestone, when she found me, that I had sat there since my arrival that morning, a period of five hours. It seemed preposterous to this dependable woman, and she took no pains to hide her annoyance. Bystanders in the station and our adjacent fellow passengers on the train must have known that she was sorely annoyed. And now I had forgotten another direction.

I went back to Jessup, inwardly perturbed, and confided my predicament to him. He counseled another glass of the sherry, and when I had drunk it I did feel rather fortified, talking perhaps more than I should otherwise have done. I told him precisely the nature of the entertainment I was expected to attend, and the good chap clicked his lips in sympathy. Then he was about to speak, but seemed to think better of it; he had been on the point of some impulsive utterance, and pulled himself up rather awkwardly to talk of other things. It was plain he felt resentful in my behalf but found it in better taste not to say so. Tactfully he changed the topic to tell me that liquor was now easy to obtain, as we were on a popular rum route from the lakes to the city. Talking of this and other matters I sat there until 5:30, desperately resolved not to appear at all at Mrs. Copplestone's triumph.

As Jessup talked on this and that, I had formed a plan. I am certain now that Jessup's liquor gave me the courage for it. I would approach our house from the rear, enter through the kitchen door, ascend the back stairs and be found in bed with threatened appendicitis, as I had done once before in order to avoid

attending a women's convention to which Mrs. Coplestone was a delegate and which she had refused to consider attending without me.

Appendicitis had availed me that time; it must do so once more, and the alleged pains must excuse my forgetfulness about the lemon ice. Yet what matter if she should not be persuaded of their realness? I felt a new temerity. I had, certainly, been emboldened by my repeated libations. Almost, for a moment, I was tempted to abandon the pretense of a physical disorder; I pictured myself facing the woman defiantly, announcing in cool, crisp tones my determination not to appear at her receptions, and my utter indifference to the character of her refreshments. Still, after a moment's reflection, this seemed needlessly extreme. The appendicitis was plausible and would be perhaps more seemly, even more dignified.

While I meditated Jessup had grown oratorical. We were living by rote; by another century routine would have staled us to a point where a gentleman with an ounce of sportsmanship in his make-up would consider life beneath him—he would no longer stoop to it. I warmly agreed with him, and questioned if mere life had ever, even in remote times, deserved all that was said in its praise. "But dash it all," I concluded, "I must return home."

"I'm d——d sorry for you, old man," said Jessup, and wrung my hand warmly. "Remember there were poets before Homer, and brave men before and since Agamemnon. I dare you to go home and say in loud tones that your soul's your own!"

Hereupon he laughed heartily. He is not one to

make a pretense that he doesn't relish his own things. I waved cheerfully to him as I went down his walk. I am sure he did not suspect that his sherry, and perhaps his discourse, had nerved me to a point where I should avoid Mrs. Copplesstone's reception and retire firmly to my bed. Standing on his veranda, his hair in disorder as always, he waved responsively to me.

I walked back along Maple Avenue, pleased to observe that, even thus withdrawn from the supporting cheer of Jessup, I felt no decrease in my courage. Mrs. Copplesstone's reception would be at its loudest and she would be counting upon my presence. This time, to her chagrin, steel would clash on steel. She would discover me stubbornly in bed and suffering violent pains.

Again I noted, as I walked, that curious sense of something portentous at the back of my mind, as if another me had assumed control of my actions but would not yet divulge its plan. This other self was sternly issuing commands, but only one at a time, with a finger on its lips. I turned firmly into Ninth Street and entered the alley that would allow me to reach our home unobserved. From either side the backs of houses stared at me, sternly noncommittal, over their clotheslines and outbuildings. I came to our rear gate, opened it, and walked with a fearless tread to the kitchen door. Not once did I falter. At the door I paused a moment, observing that the innocent rear of our home gave no hint of the odious festivity enlivening its front. There was no light in the kitchen and I could hear none of the voices I knew were at their highest beyond a few shut doors.

I softly turned the knob of the kitchen door and pushed. The door did not yield. I pushed again and perceived that a trap must have been set for me. Mrs. Coppelstone would have divined my ruse and instructed Hilda to keep her kitchen door locked so that I must enter by the front way. I knocked on the panel, meaning to bribe Hilda to admit me secretly, but no answering footstep could I hear.

Then a wave of anger swept me. Jessup had said I was a toy balloon tugging at its string, but all at once I felt that I, too, was a bell and might clang a brazen tongue in the ear of all social decencies. Curiously, also, I was aware that this other self of mine now controlled me beyond any conscious reasoning. In response to a purely brute impulse I drew back and threw my full weight against the locked door. It shook under the assault, but still held. Again I tried, my rage mounting. The door trembled promisingly. A third time I gathered all my energies, and so terrific was the force I brought into play, the door yielded at its lock and I stood within our kitchen panting from my exertions but with no qualms about what I had done. Had Mrs. Coppelstone confronted me there and then I am positive I should have spoken sharply to her and made no pretense of illness.

But she was not there, nor was Hilda. The kitchen was in deep dusk, its table bare, nor even yet could I hear the babble of rejoicing women beyond the next door. Strangely, too, my nostrils were not assailed by the odor of coffee, which is always an outstanding feature of these annoying affairs. Puzzled, I tiptoed to the swinging door of the butler's pantry, stealthily

traversed this, and pushed slightly ajar the door that gave on our dining room. A glance to the living room beyond revealed that the place was empty; there were no voices; no sandwiches, no lemon ice that should have been vanilla cream.

I let the second door swing to its place and stood trembling, a prey to the most fearful imaginings. What had happened to our home—or to me? Frankly, I recalled tales of magic I had read as a child. The place seemed to lie under an enchantment, or perhaps an entire day had been cut from my life and this was tomorrow, when Mrs. Copplestone would be lecturing at the Civic Purity League. I felt cold drops of moisture gather on my brow and roll a chill way to my beard, where they left a tickling sensation. Then I summoned courage and made my way back to the door I had broken open, for all at once I had become sheerly frightened; the empty place was growing noisy with wraiths, as it were, of the voices I had thought to hear. It was uncanny to sense them, far-off, mocking, sinister. Whatever had occurred to change Mrs. Copplestone's plans, I should not stay by myself in our home that night.

As I stepped outside the door and turned to close it the ghostly voices I had heard within grew louder, and I at once made a discovery that stupefied me. Through inattention, being engrossed with my own thoughts, I had entered burglariously the vacant Lef-fingwell home, next to ours. There, across a stretch of lawn, the shrill jangle of Mrs. Copplestone's festal disorder was at its height, and I a clumsy invader in the home of a man who had left it safely locked!

In the first realization of this catastrophe I stood petrified with dismay. Through our own open windows came the voices of women in strained gaiety, the clash of porcelain, and even the aroma of coffee, all missed in my previous absorption. A sudden burst of woman's laughter, shrill and venomous, seemed to mock my plight and aroused me to immediate necessities. Again I stepped within the Leffingwell kitchen, closing the abused door behind me, and stood in troubled debate. The shadows of dusk were heavy about me, the voices again muffled to a distant ghostly cackling.

After a moment my courage returned and I moved lightly to the front of the house, sprawling once over a footstool most outrageously left in my way. I stationed myself at a side window, where by pulling back an edge of the drawn curtain I could peer into the thronged rooms across the way. And surveying this scene of light-laughing disorder, I ceased finally to care that my negligence had resulted in lemon ice where vanilla cream was wished. My indignation mounted.

"So," I sneered, "you can gabble heartlessly there with your political gang while your husband a few yards distant stands menaced with confinement in a felon's cell!"

I found this thought running over and over through my mind and was conscious that it made me feel better.

I watched at my window a bit longer, wondering, as always, how these creatures could find so much to say simultaneously, then withdrew into the deepening shadow and sat in an armchair to consider my position

further. It was not a comfortable chair to sit in, as, though solid-appearing, it persisted in rocking at my slightest movement. I became impatient at this and sought another that would be more stable, remembering now that I had never cared for the furnishing of the Leffingwell home. They are excellent people, but their—or perhaps her—ideals of elegance seem to have clashed triumphantly with the requirements of comfort when one is in a sitting position. However, I sat rigidly on a plush-upholstered settee, unyielding, for all its promise of luxury, and reflected upon the apparently trivial chance that may begin a new pattern in the woof of our destiny.

By the merest accident such as might occur to anyone given to spells of deep thought, I was where I had no right to be and absent from that place where Mrs. Coppystone considered I had every obligation to be. I wondered if to her guests she now masked her impatience with me, as, at a recent faculty dinner party, she had pretended to laugh off my tardy arrival. In any event I knew her capable mind, already heated by my negligence in the matter of the ice, would be framing rebukes for my nonappearance and looking forward, not without a certain gusto, to the moment when she could overwhelm me with them. She would rate me soundly, and this would have to be faced.

Desperately I went again to the curtained window, and at the first glance to the revelry beyond I was seized with a new wonder: Had it indeed been mere chance that I was here? That apparently blind director at the back of my mind—was not it the cul-

prit that had brought me here, and not by chance, either? And what could I make from the guidance? Was I but a toy balloon tugging at its string or was I a bell indeed full capable of clanging a brazen tongue?

The revelry beyond was at its height. A piano sounded, and I recognized the touch of Mrs. Coppleson, who plays the instrument with a kind of skilful glibness. Even as she played she was doubtless dipping her verbal arrow points in poison for the delinquent husband's welcome when he did come. And what if he never came?

The injustices of thirty years seemed to mass upon me at this thought. I had disappeared, and yet I lived. I recalled certain speculations—idle enough—of our mathematicians. They had said that one mastering the fourth dimension might vanish instantly, yet still exist. And now it seemed oddly to me that I stared from a fourth dimension into which I had trickily disappeared. I was beyond life, yet an observer of its tumult. The knowledge elated me. I let the curtain fall back to hide the hateful picture and made my way to the upper floor of the Leffingwell house, stumbling over another atrocious footstool as I went. There were beds above, and at sight of their reassuring outlines, dimly to be traced in the dusk, I felt a sudden relaxing of taut nerves. Merely to be in the presence of a bed seemed not only to relieve all my tension but to produce a sensation of drowsiness that I profoundly relished. And for thirty years I had been told almost daily that I am hopelessly impractical!

CHAPTER II

FAR in the night I awoke heavily and was for some moments at a loss to orient myself. It seemed that I must, still half asleep, push through a jungle growth of impressions that I was in my own bed in my own room.

When remembrance at last came I was dismayed more than I can say. I had gone to sleep exultant and I awoke depressed. All that golden lust for adventure had gone and left a raging thirst. I groped stumbly to a bathroom I had observed and drank some glasses of water—gulped them rather, as if I must quench an inward conflagration. Somewhat revived, I made my way to the adjoining apartment and pulled aside the curtain of a window giving on my own house.

All there was dark and still. I had half expected lights would be ablaze. Seemingly my failure to appear had occasioned no concern. Mrs. Copplestone, I made no doubt, slept with her wonted placidity, calmly certain that on the morrow I would again be at her mercy. The air was chill, and I was made curiously apprehensive by the noises that sound at night in a house—mysterious cracklings of floor boards as if someone went stealthily overhead, little sounds that hinted a cautious trying of door knobs, soft rustlings as of an intruder's garments brushing against walls.

I have never been imaginative, but I considered that these disturbances could be better endured if I went again to the bed I had chosen.

A long time I lay listening to ominous creaks and softened footfalls, but I must at last have found peace, for when I again became conscious thin strips of sunlight were admitted to the room on either side of the curtains shrouding the two windows. I glanced at a clock on the overdecorated mantel but saw that it could not be going. It was one of those clocks that seem not to be expected to go and to be prized for their beauty alone; a clock with a glittering crockery body, effusively ornamented with pansies and other minor flowers and having its useless hands gilded. Probably it had not done an hour's honest service since the day of its purchase by someone with a flawed sense of decorative values. Mrs. Coppelstone keeps one like this in our guest room, blankly confronting a universe in which time has ceased.

I looked about for another clock that might be going, and found myself staring at a silver-framed photograph of Leffingwell on the small night table beside my bed. The man had been caught at a pleased moment. He has jowls so heavy that the upper part of his head is made to seem too narrow—rather a pear-like shape—and his inconsiderable remnant of hair, neatly brushed and extending a scant inch or two each side of the careful parting, heightens the illusion of narrowness. I reached out and with some disrelish turned the thing well away from me. Leffingwell is not a bad chap. He conducts an enterprise in which he sells lumber or something of that sort for building

purposes, and has made an excellent neighbor, but his face was not one that I could have smirking at me so near.

The room itself was little enough to my taste. Its wall paper was too vehemently colored, and of a really intemperate pattern. After a survey of my unfortunate surroundings I reached for my own watch, but found that I must have been too absorbed the night before to wind it. However, I would not long be puzzled about the time of day. I went to one of the windows and peeped out. A milk wagon had halted before my own door. So it would be seven o'clock, and I rewound my timepiece. I then dressed and went to the next room, where I could overlook the side yard and where I observed Hilda come out to take the bottle of milk and the smaller bottle of cream from the step.

And now, as on the night before, I thrilled to that curious sense of being in another plane of existence where yet I could overlook the one I had quitted. I had indeed made the fourth dimension. Often had I fancied the dead might thus return to survey us, imminent yet remote. And I could reappear at any moment I chose. I dwelt upon this thought, and suddenly I was reviewing my whole past life within those brown walls beyond with an icy aloofness I had never before achieved. I could reappear at any moment—but did I wish to reappear? Another time it might not be so easy to vanish. I reminded myself that, in vanishing this time, I had not been unassisted by circumstances. I had not meant to vanish. I had meant to slink—actually slink—to my own room and pretend a serious indisposition merely to escape some-

thing another man would have laughed off in scorn. And could I afford to give up the advantage I had gained by reason of an inadvertence that now seemed benign? At any rate I resolved that I would not appear too hastily. For the moment I would sit tightly, as our college slang has it. Then as I still looked through the narrow aperture I was seized with compunction. Perhaps Mrs. Copplesstone had indeed worried throughout the night. Perhaps I had wrongly assumed her indifference.

At that moment she appeared at the side door which I faced. She was hatted and gloved for the street and bore under one arm her dog, Pudgkins. This is a fat, revolting little beast with long hair and a snappish temper, toward whom my attitude was long ago made plain. She was brought down the steps and gently placed on the lawn, where she cavorted clumsily, wheezily, and, as always, complainingly. Cato, my cat, as handsome an animal as one would wish to see, now came bounding out from the back of the house, confronting the poor mongrel so suddenly that he was quite naturally startled to arching his back and hissing. Pudgkins squealed in fright, having on more than one occasion learned that her sex was no insurance against Cato's attacks; and what must Mrs. Copplesstone do but rush toward him with an angrily brandished parasol, at which he ran up an apple tree and looked down upon her and her monstrous pet with a quiet disdain. Mrs. Copplesstone shook the parasol at him in a threatening manner and I could see her lips move with suggestions of bitterness, after which she picked Pudgkins up and walked on to the garage.

The painful scene had been a revelation to me. Mrs. Copplestone had not been overwhelmed by any sense of catastrophe involving her husband. Never had she seemed less troubled. The rugged grandeur of her features had not been impaired by a sleepless night. Whatever she suspected had not distressed her. She betrayed, moreover, a slight impatience of manner as her common-sense shoes trod their firm way onward—slight but enough to warn me that this was no hour for our reunion. I watched her slide back the door of the garage and saw her enter our car. The motor hummed and the car backed accurately out along the cement walk beneath me. Mrs. Copplestone would be gone about her official duties.

Even at the moment I could but admire, as often I had done, the unerring skill with which she directed the car while in reverse. I myself have a time at this. I am always running off the roadway or perhaps crumpling a fender against the side wall of our home, and my lack of skill in this matter has occasioned some distressing scenes between us, especially as I seem to be unlucky even after I reach the safe highway, though I am by no means so inept as Mrs. Copplestone would have one believe. The few accidents in which I have figured have been trifling, indeed; nothing to justify her almost indecent comment.

A weight was now off my mind. My absence had occasioned no apprehension and clearly this was no time to terminate it. True, I was free to follow my original plan; free to be found on a bed of pain when Mrs. Copplestone's official duties should release her for the day. But now at last this seemed a paltry

subterfuge, unworthy of one who had the night before felt himself a bell with a brazen tongue. Again I resolved to sit tightly, to be guided by circumstances as yet in embryo.

Meantime I was conscious of hunger, and descended to the Leffingwell kitchen in search of food. As I anticipated, there was a small stock of tinned stuff. I chose a tin of beans and presently had it open, though with some difficulty, because the opener was old and dull. The price paid for the useless clock in the room above would doubtless have bought a dozen good ones. I found also a carton of wafers that made an admirable accompaniment to the beans, which I found most savory and gratifying. Such was my appetite I consumed the entire tin and an immense number of the wafers, and it was not until I had nearly finished this simple but nourishing repast that I noticed the oilstove. It would never do, of course, to light a fire in the range, as this would advertise the presence of an intruder, but with the oilstove, I thought, one might do for oneself very acceptably here, having tea, coffee and perhaps hot soups if any such should be found on the shelf. Cold though my breakfast had been, it did wonders for my spirit. Humming fearlessly—a habit I have that severely annoys Mrs. Copplestone, who insists that I am never on the key—I strolled about the shadowed rooms. On the dining-room mantel I found a small jar holding three cigars, very dry and dusty and not of a choice brand. Leffingwell will, on the occasion of a dinner party, go to the nearest drug store and buy as few cigars as will look like enough, with no great care about his choice, beyond

seeing that they are decked with paper bands. However, as I had smoked but rarely in the last score of years—Mrs. Copplestone disliking the odor and believing tobacco harmful to the brain worker—I found the one I lighted not half bad, though it had become, by reason of its great age and dryness, almost dangerously inflammable.

I now lounged into the parlor and thence to what the Leffingwells call a library, though its books are all in one case of varnished walnut which is fronted by glass doors. I may say here that the sight of bookcases with glass doors has always aroused in me a feeling of irritation. The Leffingwell books, however, were not such as to tempt me. I could see ornately bound sets of one or two novelists, and other books supposed to be improving. There was even on one shelf a set of the detestable Outline of History which has served to give so many of our half literate a smattering of past events. Doubtless this is better than nothing for the unstudious—but to call it by the name of history, which is presumed to go deeply into matters—I could not control my disgust. “Bah!” I sneered, full at the smug bindings. History—the prose narrative of past events—cannot attain its full stature in an outline.

I explored further, not caring for the parlor and library with their chairs at careful angles and their stiffly arranged cushions, and came presently to a smaller room, which was shabby, having books in an unglassed case, a desk, and a homely armed chair that looked inviting. This room, I concluded, would be the intimately personal room of Leffingwell himself,

and it at once gave a more appealing notion of the man than did the framed photograph above stairs. I relaxed in the chair and fell to examining the books. They proved without exception to be volumes of the lightest sort of fiction, chiefly tales of so-called mystery in which a murder is committed in the first chapter, the remaining ones being devoted to an identification of the criminal. There were others of a more sentimental character, all giving signs that they had been read again and again.

I am not one of the narrow sort who hold that fiction is never worthy except it have cultural or moral purpose. Indeed I once read a work entitled *The Last of the Mohicans*—while confined to my bed with a protracted bronchial ailment—and was not a little moved by certain noble passages in which its characters, both white and red, although frankly fictitious, uttered sentiments of an improving nature and in irreproachable English. But I wondered now that a chap like Leffingwell, engrossed in the grave affairs pertaining to his enterprise of selling lumber for different useful purposes, could find time to entertain himself with such trifling make-believe as I noted—*Parted at the Altar*, *Queenie's Lovers*, *Pansy's Ordeal*—things of that sort. It gave me an entirely new light on the man whose portrait hinted at no compromise with life beyond an evident self-infatuation for a face in no way remarkable. Here he must often sit, I surmised, after a busy day of selling his wares to people who desired to erect structures, and lose himself in sentimental mazes.

From sheer curiosity I picked up another of the

volumes, already much handled. It was by a woman author and I had not read a dozen pages before I perceived that she must be a writer of no mean gifts. It was a stirring tale laid in the time of one of the modern wars—a conflict between Spain and the United States actually occurring some years since—and by involving my sympathies with its personages I quickly forgot my novel surroundings. The heroine, a young girl of great beauty, was desired by a rascally Spaniard, not only because of her personal appearance but because she was legally entitled to vast estates, and she suffered at his hands a series of persecutions and indignities such as only a degenerate Latin could devise. The attentions of the scoundrel were the more loathsome because the young lady was affianced to a sailor on one of our naval vessels, a youth of sterling attributes who had won her love in the Caribbean Sea, but who had been called away to Manila Harbor by his professional duties on the battleship Olympia.

It will not be easily believed, but I wrought myself to a pitch of grave concern over the fate of this defenseless maid, especially when she was abducted by the villainous Spaniard from the home of her step-mother in Havana—a woman herself of no moral character, in league with the scoundrelly abductor—and taken against her will on his motorboat to the very harbor of Manila. At that point in the nerve-racking narrative I became convinced that all would somehow be well with the tearful captive, and in this I was correct, for the villain's motorboat exploded as it neared Manila, and she was rescued from almost certain death by drowning. It would hardly be

guessed, I imagine, that her rescuer was none other than the gallant young Jack Tar who had won her devotion and who leaped fearlessly from the deck of the *Olympia* when he saw her frail form at the mercy of the waves. Yet so it proved to be. The fainting girl was brought aboard our ship and in the arms of her rejoicing fiancé borne tenderly down the stairway into the main salon, where she was turned over to the tender-hearted matron of the ship to be revived, while Admiral Dewey, who stood by, was seen to brush a drop of suspicious moisture from his eyes.

I have, to be sure, given but the barest outline of a tale that engrossed me for many hours—an outline as inadequate as is that outline of history to convey any valid knowledge of past events.

Having finished the book with a poignant sense of loss, I sat there musing upon its excitements and upon the knowledge I had gleaned of naval life. Never before had I known that our battleships have the refining influence of a matron. Indeed my knowledge of armed warfare in modern times is perhaps not what it should be, although I once visited a British battleship on the occasion of my trip to New York—where I arrived some hours after Mrs. Copplestone by reason of loitering at a bookstall in a strange city where our train halted for a shorter interval than I thought it would. The visit to the ship had not been greatly edifying at the time, but I now recalled it with pleasure. The ship was named the *Irritable*, I believe, or perhaps the *Formidable*—some name of that character—and the colonel of the British Navy who showed us about had been politely concerned that we see all its

points of interest. For that solicitude I was now grateful, because it enabled me to visualize the scene I had just read, the deck from which the ardent young sailor sprang, and the powerful guns that were to protect his precious burden. I could not recall having met a matron, but perhaps the British are behind us in this detail, as they are in so many others.

In the midst of this pleasant musing I became sharply aware of hunger, and looking at my watch was surprised to find the hour four o'clock. I had lost count of time in my absorption and was thrilled to recall that there had been no one about to badger me for this. What I felt was a sort of impudent licentiousness. I could do as I wished. Once more I sought the kitchen and opened some tins of food: sardines this time. And again noticing the oilstove I lighted it, heated some water and after a long search found tea. It was black tea and I prefer green, but I did not murmur as I prepared it, for I felt I was in no position to complain. With the sardines, crackers and tea I made a satisfactory meal, though as I neared the end of it I received a good fright.

Gazing absently from the kitchen window as I munched a cracker I saw the alley gate swiftly open and a man step inside. So startled was I that the cup fell from my hand and was shattered on the floor. My first thought was that I had been discovered. Then I observed that the intruder was what is called in common parlance a sandwich. Above his head was a sign fastened to his shoulders by iron clamps. My breath came quickly as I watched his strange behavior. He closed the gate behind him, undid some straps at his

shoulders and, removing his burden, threw it carelessly down. He then went with a familiar air to a tattered hammock hung between two trees, extended himself in this and assumed an attitude of repose.

I breathed more freely now, since it was plain my own presence had not drawn him here, but I was vexed at the fellow's effrontery. Having observed in his progress of our avenue that the house was for the time tenantless, he entered the rear yard as coolly as if the place were his own and made himself at home. Moreover, he was disgracefully betraying a trust imposed in him by his employer.

His sign read, in large letters, Don't Kill Your Wife—Let the Star Laundry Do Your Dirty Work. I had often remarked it on our streets, but never before had I glanced at the person supporting it. I saw him to be a shabbily dressed creature, wearing a nondescript gray beard, with a battered and stained black hat pulled down over an ineffectual face. He was altogether one of those wretches who would not only prove false to their trust but who, seeing the chance, would enter another's premises.

So indignant was I at his cheek, as it is called, I was on the point of rushing out to order the fellow off about his business, but a second thought deterred me: Mrs. Copplestone might return at any moment or Hilda from our own kitchen might discover me. So I resolved to let the creature stay where he certainly had not the least right to be. As I watched him it was plain that he slept.

Knowing I should be uneasy until he left, I walked back and forth through the empty rooms, getting a bit

of needed exercise, and at the front of the house I suffered another fright, caused by a loud thump on the front door. What it might mean I could not imagine, and for a trembling moment was rooted where I stood. Then as it was not repeated I ventured to peer out, and saw that the blow must have been caused by the urchin who delivers our evening paper. He rides through the street on a bicycle, his papers in a knapsack affair at his back. At each stop he twists one so that he can throw it from the curb to the house. He was stopping at my own home as I looked.

The Leffingwells had forgotten to order their paper discontinued, and several lay outside the door. I was reminded of an occasion when Mrs. Copplestone and I were absent for ten days and a press of other matters had caused me to forget her repeated injunction to stop not only the paper but our daily milk, which were found accumulated on our return. I had never been able to persuade her that matters of even greater importance had exclusively occupied my mind. I wondered now if Leffingwell would be blamed for these useless papers, though I saw I might take them in for myself after nightfall.

An hour later the intruder in the hammock awoke and stood up to stretch himself luxuriously. He then picked up his wreck of a hat and went to readjust the sign which he was paid to carry. He was leisurely in his movements, not at all furtive, and I was nettled by his barefaced assurance. This was unreasonable of me, I know, because I was not the owner of the property he invaded, yet I could hardly restrain myself from ordering him not to repeat his entry. However,

he went out with the same brassy presumption, and I had no doubt that he would repeat his audacious performance on the morrow.

Meanwhile I had to decide upon my own course of action. The longer I was absent from our home the greater difficulty I should have in explaining my course to Mrs. Copplestone. Already I had been too long away to say with any plausibility that I had fainted by the wayside. On the other hand, this wine of freedom was heady stuff. I was beginning to feel myself another man; one who could go and come as he chose, disregarding the whims of a woman. My surroundings, it is true, were not ideal; the Leffingwell home was not one that would long content me. And yet it was not intolerable. I could make shift to do with it for at least another day or two, in which I would enjoy this new intoxicant.

When it became dark enough to shield me I crept around to the front porch, where I gathered up the newspapers and brought them into the homelike room where I had read through the morning. Several of them were of dates before my arrival here, but I quickly found the latest and by the light of a shaded candle—for I must be careful that no light shone through the windows—I resumed touch with the world I had left.

And there, on the first page, was my own name in glaring type, although what earliest caught my eye was Husband of Mayor Missing. Later I was referred to as "spouse of our newly elected mayor," and both of these terms I found offensive. I had not suspected that such distasteful publicity would ensue, and for

some moments I sat flushed with embarrassment. Mrs. Copplestone, interviewed, had declared that she did not suspect foul play. What she did suspect, I was aghast to read, was that I had wandered away in a fit of absent-mindedness. I had been acting queerly of late, and on the day of my disappearance had left after promising to do an errand for her. This very simple errand I had unaccountably failed to do, and it was her belief that I had suffered a mental breakdown.

A suggestion of the reporter that I might have been abducted, to be held for ransom, she declared to be preposterous, and she flatly discouraged a half-formed plan to drag the lake for me. She was convinced, she said, that I would return of my own accord when I regained my senses. I was hot with resentment when I had read the callous words.

How like her it was to assume that her husband could have failed to return only through a mental defect! That one of sound mind could stay away was beyond her comprehension. Then and there, I think, I resolved on my great plan. This was the sting I had needed. I read my description—"five feet eight inches high; weight one hundred and forty pounds; age fifty-nine; has a slight stoop; beard not well trimmed and of a reddish gray; eyes blue and near-sighted, requiring the use of spectacles." These were perhaps not the words of Mrs. Copplestone, yet she must have approved them, and the bald summary displeased me. It seemed a cheap way of dismissing one who might, indeed, have met with any manner of foul play.

Again, I was said to be careless of dress, and the suit I wore was minutely described. It is true I am no fop, but it is also true that I would not have chosen this particular suit, which was the one Mrs. Copplestone had selected—in some irritation, I fancy—on the day I failed to appear at the clothier's. I especially loathed the pattern of rich purples and greens—preferring something in a neutral gray—and the coat was ill-fitting so that I always felt trussed when wearing it.

There was injustice and a callous indifference all through the screech. It might have been the notice of a straying horse. Had Mrs. Copplestone shown a proper concern for her loss, had the sheet reported her prostrate from grief or even wrought to a high tension by worry, it is probable that I should at this moment have returned to her, but not in the face of a slur upon my mental soundness, aggravated by that unfeeling disparagement of my attire. Coolly determined now, I went to the kitchen for another cup of tea and a bowl of reviving soup, of which I had found a supply. In retiring for the night I chose a new bed, for of course the one occupied the night before had not been remade.

And lying there in the still house I mused upon another article in the same newspaper that contained the casual and heartless account of my disappearance. It told of a famous French criminal who had been known as Bluebeard. This truly remarkable man had married, and murdered, as many as a dozen wives. He was a low fellow, of course, but what impressed me chiefly was not that he should have been a murderer at heart but that he should continue to marry one

woman after another. I could imagine his wedding the first, and perhaps his being goaded to a point where he would find it best to kill her, but, being again a free man, to go on repeatedly and unnecessarily marrying other women seemed to mark him as not a strong character.

I awoke with plans for escape running through my mind. My first act was to watch from the side window for the appearance of Mrs. Coppleson, who came out as on the morning before with untroubled mien and marched firmly to our car after permitting Pudgkins a brief run. Cato this time surveyed the party from around the kitchen steps, so that I had no doubt he had been abused during my absence. Mrs. Coppleson merely glanced contemptuously over her shoulder at him and snapped her fingers, whereupon he turned and disappeared in a panic. Mrs. Coppleson has a way of snapping her fingers that is disconcerting, and she does it equally well with either hand.

As I watched the car back out I could not but be chilled by her unruffled demeanor. Once when Pudgkins was missing, she not only passed a sleepless night but prevented me from sleeping, and morning had found her a wreck from worry. Now that her husband was lost, not an uneasy line showed in her face. I sneered openly at the car as it passed under my window. Breakfast eaten—I had left the oilstove burning overnight so that the kitchen was pleasantly warm—I began to search closets for a suit of clothes that would be greatly different from those I had worn. I found these in plenty, but they were too new, too large,

and much too loud. I recalled now that Leffingwell dressed rather garishly, his fancy running to stripes and checks, too emphatic for one who wished to escape notice.

Having searched the upper rooms, I descended in a sort of idle desperation, to the cellar, and was delighted to find there a suit I recalled as being worn by one of our students who tended the Leffingwell furnace and did odd jobs about the place during winters. This answered my purpose admirably and I lost no time in arraying myself in it. The trousers and coat were crumpled, well worn, altogether dingy. Also there was a pair of battered shoes for which I discarded my new ones. Regarding myself in a mirror I was astonished at the change in my appearance. I looked now to be a sturdy agrarian type such as one is conscious of passing but does not closely scrutinize. Only my beard served to remind me of myself, and I soon rendered this unfamiliar with a pair of scissors. They had described my beard as untrimmed, so I trimmed it closely to my face until I seemed to be a person who had untidily not shaved for some days. I will not deny that I was rather thrilled as I surveyed the final effects. I was another man, my clothing inconspicuous, my face unemphatic. I was ripe for adventure in the great out-of-doors.

I should have gone at once but second thought warned me that I had better wait until nightfall, when I would be still less recognizable. Accordingly I went into the little room where I had read the morning before, and passed the day quietly with stories of crime and mystery. Rather glad was I of this, because they

were rich in suggestions of disguise and evasion. And here I was reminded, too, that I would need an assumed name. A character in one of the tales had lived for two years in a London apartment under the name of Hector Montague, although he was a criminal whose real name was Jasper Vinton, better known to the police of two continents as The Fox. For myself Hector Montague was too pretentious a name. I needed one as neutral as my garb, a short, plain name such as one easily forgets. For a long time I considered the various names I could recall.

Smith occurred to me quite early, but I decided against it for a curious reason—it was too common. Given by a man who had for any reason excited suspicion, it would be less convincing than one less familiar. The name I needed must not be pretentious and yet it must be plausible. Jones I abandoned for the reason that made Smith objectionable. Robinson was better, and Brown perhaps still better, but while I weighed the merits of these the name Simms flashed through my mind—it being the maiden name of Mrs. Copplestone, whose father was known as Honest Nick Simms even after his trouble with the affairs of a corporation which he controlled. Simms seemed to me to be the ideal name for my purpose. I practiced thinking of myself as someone named Simms.

Promptly at four o'clock the intruder of the day before appeared at the alley gate, disburdened himself of his sign and coolly went to sleep in the Leffingwell hammock. Again I was nettled by the brazen assurance with which he invaded premises not his own. I had an impulse to telephone the police about him, but

saw at once that this action, however well meant, might reveal my own presence, which was, of course, undesirable, so I let the fellow sleep. Then as the day drew on I watched for the evening paper and obtained this as soon as darkness permitted, having a wish to see what might further be said about my disappearance and rather hoping that Mrs. Copplestone would be showing some proper sense of her loss. But no; when I scanned the sheet, held close to my shaded candle, I learned that in her office at the city hall—where it appeared she was actually transacting public business while my corpse might have lain like a beast's within a mile of her—she repeated her conviction that I was safe and would return when I wished to. Again she dismissed as preposterous the theory that I might have been kidnaped, and curtly negatived the plan of offering a reward for my recovery.

Others, however, were showing a decent concern. My description had been telegraphed to neighboring cities, the lake was to be dragged near its shore, and parties of searchers were scouring the adjacent country in the hope of discovering my remains. That Mrs. Copplestone stayed so cool in the face of these sinister probabilities could be understood only by one who knew her as I did, but even I was amazed at her indifference. Reading between the lines of the interview she again accorded, it seemed to me that she was not at all displeased to have me referred to as husband of mayor and mayor's spouse, these breaches of good taste being again committed.

But with searching parties out, it seemed to me advisable to keep to my present quarters for at least

another day. Even in my fairly efficient disguise and at night I might be discovered. I came to this decision with reluctance, because, to put it frankly, I was tired of the Leffingwell house. I was continually stumbling over footstools, the furnishings offended me in many ways, the rooms upstairs were disorderly as a result of my search for suitable clothing, and the kitchen, because of its soiled and broken dishes, needed a thorough going-over. But I saw it best to delay my start until the excitement died, and resolved to endure my surroundings a bit longer.

Again the following morning I watched Mrs. Copplestone perform her routine. But not a sign of concern marred the placidity of her face; she was her cool stern self as she brandished her parasol at Cato when he came running to frolic with Pudgkins. To watch this woman one would have little dreamed that her husband might at that moment be lying at the bottom of a lake, his drowned hand clutching futilely at weeds and rushes; or left to rot under some hedge where he had been tossed by a speeding motorist: or even held a prisoner in some foul cellar by a band of ruffians. She was finely the mayor of Fairwater, widowed perhaps, but still capable.

Once more I read of strange adventures to pass my time, and the tales sharpened my longing to be off. Already I had quit thinking of myself as Copplestone and ceased to be shocked when I saw an unfamiliar person in the mirrors. Engrossed in one of the stories, in which a criminal for long escaped detection by the most ingenious devices, I again allowed my luncheon hour to pass, and it was nearly four when I went

to the kitchen to prepare it. Noting the hour I determined to make a last hearty meal and be ready for my escape at nightfall. The searchers must by this time have grown discouraged. Being repelled by the idea of sardines, I hit on the plan of combining a tin of beans with a tin of corn. This would be nourishing and perhaps appetizing as well.

I had opened the tins and poured their contents into a pan when I was further annoyed by the behavior of the oilstove. This had burned a long time because I had again forgotten to turn out the flame, and apparently the stock of oil was now exhausted, for the thing flickered and with an evil smell expired. I could find no supply of oil in the kitchen, search as I would. Recalling the cellar, I went there and found a large tin which seemed to contain what I looked for. I took it to the kitchen where my food was waiting to be heated, and as I looked for a way to open the tin I glanced out and saw that the sandwich had already taken his place in the hammock, having entered doubtless while I was in the cellar. He very apparently slept, so I gave him no further attention but resumed my labors on the tin of oil.

I at length made a ragged breach in this and then searched for the magazine of the oilstove which I must refill. It was a clumsy contrivance and I am surprised that the Leffingwells had put up with it, because in filling it through a narrow aperture I could not avoid spilling a large quantity of oil about the floor. Then the thing tottered unsteadily and I was obliged to drop the heavy oil tin in order to grasp the magazine and keep it from falling, so that yet more

of the stuff was spilled. I have never claimed to be an adept in machinery, but at last I succeeded in getting the replenished magazine back in place and with a sigh of relief I touched a lighted match to the dead wick.

The explosion that instantly occurred was of quite amazing violence. Possibly the flame of my match had come in contact with oil spilled over the stove's top, or perhaps it was due to the circumstance that—as I now instantly recognized—the so-called oil had been gasoline, which I believe is far more inflammable than petroleum. At any rate, my remnant of beard and my eyebrows were smartly singed, and as I rubbed them I saw that a flame was spreading up the wood-work and creeping along the floor toward my feet with fierce spurts of energy. I was glad that I had so lately read a tale in which the chief character, though a criminal, had again and again saved himself by his gift of cool thinking in the gravest emergencies. I knew now that I must be cool; that I must leave quickly but without excitement. I reached for the head covering which I had chosen—a golfing cap much too large for me, but which would shield the upper part of my face—went to the door, softly opened it, stepped out and closed it again. I stood a moment, listening to a flame that snapped inside, again reminded myself that coolness alone would avert discovery and sauntered in a casual manner toward the gate. There I stopped, briefly observing that the sandwich still slept in his hammock.

It was then that my brightest inspiration came. I lifted the sign of the Star Laundry, placed the iron

clamps over my shoulders, fastened the straps and, emerging from the gate, walked quickly up the alley to Ninth Street.

As I paused there a loud deep detonation came from what seemed to be the Leffingwell house. It was possible that the tin of gasoline had exploded. I walked on down Ninth Street in the manner of one who has been employed to carry an advertisement, listlessly and with bowed head. Two ladies and a boy I passed did not even glance at me. My theory had been sound. In such cases one may stare at the sign, but the man who carries it is never by any chance regarded. I might now even face a band of those properly alarmed people who searched for me, and stroll by them unnoticed. It had all been thrilling, and I recalled a saying of Jessup's, "A thrill a day keeps the doctor away." On to Chestnut Street I went, careful to keep in character. A dozen persons whom I passed would either stare idly at my advertisement or glance neither at it nor at me. Not once, I am certain, did any eyes more than flit over me.

As I moved along Chestnut Street, which would lead me to the open country, I heard the clang of our fire engine, and had no doubt it would be on its way to the Leffingwell home, which, it occurred to me to hope, might be amply insured. Personally I have never liked the looks of insurance policies, printed as they are in different sorts of type, bristling with pasted slips and confusing with red-inked lines and interlineations. They have always seemed to me to be documents cunningly contrived for evasion, and I have no doubt that if one were read through word for word

—they are obviously arranged to discourage this practice—it would be found that the insured has small chance of recovering his loss. Still, I knew Leffingwell to be a shrewd man of business, and it was probable that he had taken every precaution.

Strolling forward I found myself regretting that I had not been able to test the merits of my ingenious combination of corn and beans. Another time, with more leisure, I must try again. At the end of Chestnut Street I turned into a lane that would lead me to the highway, and at the upper end of this I thought it best to relinquish my disguising sign. Unfastening the straps I heaved the contrivance into a clump of underbrush. It had served me well but it was not a thing to carry along country roads, where it would be sure to excite comment in inverse ratio to the indifference of the city.

I was presently brought to the reflection that, if Leffingwell's house had been fated to burn, it could not have done so more opportunely, for the increasing number of people I passed had been so taken up with the idea of a fire that I might still have been invisibly in my fourth dimension. I have often wondered about this—why grown, mature persons are so childishly entertained by fire engines and buildings aflame.

CHAPTER III

DESPITE my disguise I was under some apprehension of discovery for a long time after I reached the highway. With head bent and my too large cap pulled well over it, I walked briskly at the roadside, nor would I raise my glance to passing traffic. Not once was I accosted, however, and after an hour's travel had put me some three miles beyond the limits of Fairwater I began to feel more secure, though even now I did not loiter nor look up, but continued as a pedestrian with a definite aim in view. By this time I was well into the agricultural districts, and, realizing that every furlong I gained lessened the chances of detection, I began to enjoy the peace and beauty of these pastoral surroundings.

At each homestead I noted with pleasure the twilight activities; the tired farm laborers returning from their field toil, the cattle being urged into their pens with musical shouts, often by children who seemed to make rather a game of it; the horses, still attired in their harness, sipping long drafts of water from the troughs; the strident squealing of pigs and, among the barnyard fowl, an air of cheerful home-coming after their long wholesome day in the open.

Above all, I pleased in my new and hardly won liberty in this great out-of-doors. I have always been fond of Nature, and not since I could remember, doubt-

less not since the days of my irresponsible boyhood, had I been free to enjoy its delights under auspices so stimulating. No longer could I be rebuked because of forgetting to perform acts alleged to be important; no disturbing voice could arouse me from meditation about the vital things of life. I might be as late as I chose for dinner and none would rate me soundly for it. I had, I smilingly reflected, in the language of some phrase-maker unremembered for the moment, burned my bridges behind me. I was carelessly sauntering over a pretty scene of hill and wooded dale, toward a sun already setting in the far west, emancipated at last from confinement grown irksome not alone because the house had not been one I should have chosen for an indefinite stay but for the reason that I need no longer be furtive. Now I could be fearless as well as free, look the world in the face and walk forward unregarded to that western sun. I might, indeed, continue on to the famed Rocky Mountains which I had ever wished to behold, and no one would have the right to question or hurry or retard my progress. I no longer moved with bowed head, but as one who has the right to live his own life in his own way. Often had I pictured myself in precisely this situation—set down, care-free, nameless and without responsibilities among a simple, kindly people who would accept me on my merits and where I might live for years with no harassing restrictions.

I might be as late for dinner as I chose! Again and again this thought recurred to me. Such was its persistence I at length discovered it to have a certain physiological origin. I recalled that I was already late

for dinner, and observed the pangs of hunger becoming each moment more acute. Owing to the haste in which I had been compelled to leave the ill-fated Lef-fingwell house not a morsel of food had passed my lips since the simple breakfast I had prepared there, and my brisk walking had sharpened an appetite that would have been exigent under any circumstances. I remembered the pan of excellent corn and beans I left unheated, and was stung with a new sense of my ill luck in those last moments. I wondered if I were not possibly approaching a village where food could be purchased. I considered venturing to apply at one of the farm-houses I passed, but decided that this would still be a risk, as I could hardly yet have passed the radius covered by news of my disappearance, and some busy-body might recognize me, in spite of my appearance, and communicate with the searchers at Fairwater. It would be far safer to continue, hungry as I was, until a village was reached.

At this point I was brought to a sudden halt and heard myself utter a cry of dismay. Again and again since my escape I had been subtly warned by something at the back of my mind that all was not as well with me as it seemed to be. I had not been really troubled by this obscure reminder, and had dismissed it as often as it came, because all too plainly my position was sound. Yet now I knew the alarm had been genuine—I was penniless! In my delight at finding and in my haste in changing to the garments I now wore, I had neglected to remove any of my belongings from the objectionable suit I discarded. I had been possessed, I knew, of several bank notes amounting to twenty or

fifty dollars or thereabouts, as well as a change purse heavy with silver; and in addition to these sums, there had been pinned in the upper right-hand coat pocket a five-dollar bill as a reserve fund in case I should find myself abroad and penniless--this latter being a rule set in force by Mrs. Copplestone after it had chanced on one or two occasions that I had been compelled to solicit strangers for a small loan. And this stock of money, as well as my watch, notebook, fountain pen and other trifles, had been left behind. To retrace my steps for them was out of the question; I should not only incur risk of discovery but the valuables might even now be utterly destroyed by the fire-fiend. Nor could I longer, I reflected, resort to the device of requesting a loan from strangers on the presentation of my card. Not only was my card case among the left articles but I realized that in my present guise strangers would be all too likely to regard me as not worthy of confidence. I had been begged for trifling loans by shabby fellows of my own present appearance too often not to foresee the result.

The alarming discovery was made while I paused midway up a steep hill, and I was suddenly conscious of a great depression. My feet were weary, my appetite clamored, and though it may scarce be credited, I suddenly found myself picturing as attractive the home I had not entered for three days and nights. I saw our table spread with appetizing viands, and myself eating to repletion; saw my comfortable slippers and the couch upon which I would later recline with the reading light at its head. It was but the madness of a moment, for I saw also the inevitable accompani-

ment of Mrs. Coplestone's reproaches and condemnations, so not long did I permit the vision to beguile. Who was I, the world spread at my feet like a richly patterned rug, to be making a god of my stomach? Who was I to become petulant under these slight discomforts when I had so ingeniously gained freedom of action and surcease from the frets of an adverse conjugal condition? With renewed spirit I pushed on up the hill to where the road topped it after a sharp turn on a still ascending grade, resolved to laugh off my plight in true gipsy fashion.

Night had now definitely fallen, lighted by only a few dim stars, so that I was in almost utter darkness. Nor could I discern the glimmer of any farmhouse where I might now have dared seek food and shelter. Scarce twenty feet could I see the highroad before me.

As I paused I heard the distant baying of a dog. The tone was that of a large animal, peevish about something, and it occurred to me that rather than to go on now and risk an encounter with the beast I might do better to rest a bit by the wayside until he should have become quiet. Accordingly I left the road, climbed a low, turfed bank at its side, and reclined beside a clump of brushwood growing there. It was good to rest again on the fresh young grass, and since I had found among the clothing in the Leffingwell basement a rough shirt of heavy gray flannel, I did not find the night air insalubrious. Indeed it was almost balmy and the scent of herbage burned by the day's sun still came warm. In the wood back of me crickets chirped incessantly and, as I after a moment lay out at full length, their cheerful chorus had a lulling effect.

Before long, my hunger in abeyance for the moment, my huge cap protecting my head, I slept.

That this sleep must have lasted some hours I inferred by my stiffened joints when I awoke in the night air, which had gained a sharp chill, though it was better lighted now by the risen moon. I drew up to a sitting posture on my bank and saw that I had been aroused by a motor car ascending the stiff grade that curved so sharply a hundred feet back along the way I had come. I heard its uproar, increased by an open muffler, some moments before its headlights gleamed down the highway in front of me. Instead of continuing, the car was brought to a halt at the roadside halfway between the summit and my resting-place. I was rather blinded by the glare, but was able to descry two men emerge from it, and the car must have had a third occupant, for the lights were immediately switched off. In the dark, to which my eyes were now accustomed, I could dimly make out the line of the car and of the three figures grouped before it. Faintly I could hear the murmur of low-toned voices. My impulse was to join them, after a reassuring hail—so that they could not suspect me of evil intentions—and perhaps be invited to share their food, if, perchance, they had halted for a moonlight picnic. But something deterred me from this essay in comradeship, probably some quality of guarded tension in their quick but repressed tones. As I paused their talk ceased and they seemed to separate and secrete themselves. Whatever their mission, it was not that of a moonlight repast, and I determined to have a better assurance of my welcome before announcing my presence.

I waited what must have been a quarter hour, idly reflecting the while that on the morrow I could perhaps discover in the wood at my back some edible roots and berries such as travelers so often subsist on in a strange land. I then concluded that the strange men in the car must have stopped to rest as I had done, and would now be sleeping. At the same moment I heard dimly in the valley below the clatter and rumble of another approaching car, a much heavier car, I thought, as the sound grew near; and in this I was correct, for when the lights shone at last over the grade I saw them to be on a heavy truck piled high with goods. So slowly had the heavy vehicle made the ascent it was barely moving when it reached the level and it had not regained speed when it came abreast of the darkened car at the roadside.

Hereupon I saw the three figures spring from the shadow of this car, and a voice of rough command shouted, "Pull up there, you ——" followed by an expletive so vilely foul that I knew this could be no mere prank of jesters. Nor indeed was it, for the truck at once accelerated its speed, and at the same instant there was the spitting of fire from its seat, followed by the report of a weapon. At once followed a fusillade of shots, marked by swift flashes of red, from the three who had lain in wait and who I now saw must have been highway robbers of the most desperate character.

Fearing for my own safety I arose and fled swiftly down the road along its raised bank perhaps a hundred feet. Behind me I was aware that the fleeing truck followed amid the continuous explosion of shots, and I had decided that I must diverge to the woods on

my right if I would be safely outside the line of fire, when I was deterred from this by the hunted man bringing his car to stop directly before me. "D——n them!" I heard him say in a violent tone, after which he groaned, while not so far back I could hear the sharp patter of feet on the paved way. I saw that I might be of assistance in foiling these evildoers, and sprang to the step of the car, crying to the driver, "A friend is near if you need help!"

"Here, quick!" exclaimed he, and thrust a curious-feeling metallic object into my hands. "Give them h——l!" he cried.

I had never discharged a firearm, but I extended the article well before me in the direction of the rascally pursuers and pulled something. The result was a continuous stream of fire and a series of the most alarming explosions, while I could feel the weapon growing warm in my grasp.

"Good work!" shrieked the driver, clumsily shoving at me a second weapon which acted after the manner of the first when I had reached it well from me and pressed it with a finger.

Now we heard yells of pain from the rear and the most obscene imprecations I had ever listened to, but the pursuing steps had for the moment ceased. Plainly my shots had dismayed the rascals and they saw that I was not to be trifled with. "Good work!" again exclaimed the driver. "I bet you sent them all to the d——l." We both listened, and now shots from the pursuers were renewed, their bullets striking the back of our load.

"You can drive a car?" then demanded the fellow,

who was all excitement. "Yes—you can drive a car." I was about to explain that I could do plain driving pretty well, driving, that is, straight ahead, but would hardly trust myself to back or sharply turn so monstrous a vehicle, but he shut me off, and indeed I perceived that his need was not to back up but to go on.

"They got me in this shoulder," he said, "and my arm's no good." I saw that he was wounded, for blood trickled down his sleeve. Unhesitatingly I took the seat he vacated, put the car into motion, and we were off just as another bombardment began and another running of feet was heard on the road behind us.

"Drive like h——l and we get away, d——n them!" cried the wounded man.

I accordingly put on all speed while now faintly from the rear came other shots and cries of baffled rage. The incident had come upon me with so little warning and been so quickly over, it was difficult for me to realize how from my bed on the ground I should come in a few seconds to be driving a motor truck madly across the land, sitting beside a wounded man who clawed at his right shoulder with his left hand and muttered in the most profane manner. I wondered if I might not still recline on my hard couch in the clutch of a nightmare. Yet gradually a sense of realness came to my disordered fancies and I saw that my position had actually changed. My companion after a time with many groans took the two weapons I had used and reloaded them as we sped on, though his left hand was of little use in the work.

"Maybe they follow," he explained, "but maybe not; maybe you send too many to h——l."

"There were three of the scoundrels," I said. "I saw them halt their car and extinguish their lights, although I did not suspect they were highway robbers."

"D——d hijackers," he retorted, using his own term to designate the ruffians. I could make out by now that the man was a foreigner, of a Latin race, short, stoutly built, with a swarthy countenance. "Keep going fast," he continued after a groan, "and you bet we give them more h——l fire if they follow."

I needed little urging to drive fast. I had always longed to drive a motor car rapidly, but never before for various reasons had the privilege been mine. Now it was not only advisable but Mrs. Copplestone would not be able to censure me for recklessness. When we had put a round dozen of miles between us and our encounter with the blackguardly crew I began to take a genuine delight in the situation. The car ran truly, obeying my lightest touch on its wheel, and I reflected that I was at last on a journey after my own heart. I had not to reach a certain place at a certain time, I had not to return at a designated hour, and, best of all, I did not know where I was going. I caught a fine exhilaration from this freedom. My hunger had ceased to annoy and, except that the fellow beside me had grave need of a surgeon, I should have wished our ride to be indefinitely prolonged. I was thrilled, too, at the knowledge that criminal activities, such as the mystery tales recounted, should have been running so close to the surface of my unexciting life. At any time in all my dull years, apparently, I could have mingled with them by stepping a few yards from my own door.

My wounded companion would eagerly direct me to the right turn at crossroads and at the same time adjure me to greater speed. Doing this he would address me as Bo. "Take the right turn, Bo. Keep her moving, Bo!" And twice he said, "Pretty fast company, you are, Bo!" which I took as a tribute to my skill in driving, and wished Mrs. Copplestone might have heard. Once and again he instructed me to halt and light cigarettes for him which I placed between his lips.

The moon had long since gone down and a ghostly light from the east began to reveal details in the landscape we traveled. This was an adventure in itself, unprecedented for me, to watch the dawn light creep over a sleeping world while I shattered the silence with the clamor of my vehicle. I received a new and strangely intimate sense of cosmic relations, a vivid realization that I was on a huge ball that slowly turned in space and would continue to turn until we again faced the sun. It was a familiar phenomenon, of which I had long since been aware in a bookish way, but not before had I observed it so nearly.

As the scene lightened, my companion stirred and looked about him, then addressed me. "Now we are coming, Bo. Here is the railroad track; turn right after you cross." I took the turn he indicated a mile beyond the track and saw that we approached a town. It was well-nigh hidden by clumps of growing trees, but many stacks and steeples pierced the canopy of foliage. My companion became as vivacious as his enfeebled condition would permit.

"Now we come to the big gate, Bo! That's where

you turn in." We approached the gate and I saw the place to be a sort of country inn at the town's edge, with a stretch of veranda along the road, the gate leading to a side yard. This gate stood open between two square posts and perhaps I turned my truck too quickly, for, although I missed one of them I heard quite a crash as the ponderous vehicle raked the other and sent it toppling. Somewhat dismayed by this contretemps I pulled up quickly inside the yard and at the same moment a stout disheveled man rushed excitedly from a side door of the establishment, loudly crying, "Hey! What the h——l, there! Where you going, you d——d idiot!" Then as his eyes cleared he came down the steps to us and I saw that he was indeed the man who would use language of this sort, a rough, rather commonly dressed fellow, portly, and with a florid, irritable face. His expression of annoyance vanished quickly, however, and gave place to one of amazement when he saw me at the wheel and observed the blood upon my companion's shoulder.

"Something doing, Joe?" he demanded.

The latter spoke up instantly.

"Boss, this bozo, he's pretty fast company; he knocked off a couple of guys back there and saved your stuff."

The fellow seemed taken aback at this, but in a moment he recovered and was helping the wounded Joe to dismount from his seat. When he had done this he keenly surveyed the vacant seat, which bore profuse evidence of our affray, glanced sharply again at me and called over his shoulder, "Hey, Ed, come out here!"

From the side door appeared a younger man,

slighter, more intelligent-looking, who smoothed his recently wetted hair as he came.

"Get this bus around back and the boys to unloading," commanded the first man, and added, as the one called Ed surveyed us with amazement, "We nearly got hijacked."

"This bozo is fast company all right," again said the wounded man. "He knocks off a couple of guys back there." I thought if he were referring to the gateposts he was wrong, as I had knocked off only one by reason of turning too sharply, but before I could correct him the chap called Ed had come to my side of the truck and bruskiy motioned me to dismount. When I had done so he took my place and drove the vehicle toward some outbuildings at the rear. It was with real regret I saw it go, for on its seat I had enjoyed some of the most satisfactory moments of my life. I was given no time to dwell upon this, however, for the remaining man ordered me inside, at the same time supporting his wounded employee up the steps.

The room we entered was a kitchen, still dim in the morning light, where a slatternly maid was laying a fire in the range. The owner guided his charge to a chair and went into an adjoining room, where I presently heard him in guarded tones request the immediate attendance of a medical man. Meantime Joe, slumped in his chair, regarded me with a sort of wan admiration. "Pretty fast company," he murmured, but rolled to the floor in a faint as the words left his lips. The man who had returned from the telephone as Joe fell raised his inanimate form and bore it to an inner room, commanding me to remain where I was.

The maid, having her fire under way, was now slicing ham at a table, and the sight of this brought my hunger back upon me, redoubled. I resolved instantly that I should not leave the place until I had by some means obtained food. Being utterly chilled I moved my chair close to the range, in which the fire was roaring, but I was very soon routed from this position, finding even the room intolerable, for the maid, a quite stupid, sluggish-looking woman of middle age, began to drop the slices of ham into a hot skillet, and the aroma of this well-nigh drove me to madness. I tried moving my chair back, but the scent penetrated every corner of the apartment, and I rushed to the outer air for relief.

Sitting on the steps I heard the host, for so I took him to be, enter the kitchen and demand, "Hey, Tilly, where'd that tramp go?" The woman must have motioned to the door, for the fellow at once came to it and was about to address me, but at that moment a car sputtered into the yard and a man emerged from it with a black bag. He was hailed by the host.

"Hey, doc—hurry in to Joe; he had a sort of accident." The doctor went within and the host, about to follow him, paused and glanced again at me. "Hey, better stick inside, Bo," he said not unkindly.

I explained my predicament as simply as I could. "Sitting inside your kitchen," I said, "is torture to me while your servant is cooking ham. Since late yesterday morning not a morsel of food has passed my lips, and the aroma of cooking in that confined apartment has become really excruciating. So if you don't mind I would rather rest quietly here, although I am chilled to the bone, until—that is——"

I broke off in some confusion, lest I seem to be hinting that I sought an invitation to breakfast. I noted that almost from the beginning of my speech the fellow had drawn himself up in amazement, regarding me with a startled look. He seemed, indeed, rather dazed, brushing a huge and rather hairy hand across his eyes, as he exclaimed in low, tense tones, "Well, I am d——d!" A moment he stared incredulously at me, then turned to the open door of the kitchen and roared, "Hey, Tilly, get a movement on! This gentleman has brought his appetite. And don't you quit cooking until he gives you an office to—hear me!" He then turned to me, saying, "All right, Professor; come in and sit up; she's got enough to start you off." With which words he followed after the medical man who had disappeared within.

Looking into the kitchen I saw that a cloth of red and white check now covered the table. A place had been laid, and before it was an immense platter crowded with slices of ham and bordered with eggs that had been fried in its juice. Without a word of apology I seated myself and began to eat, while the maid, with a detached, incurious air, brought me steaming coffee in a large thick cup and returned to the stove, where she resumed her work of cooking batter cakes on a griddle.

For the moment I was all animal. I forgot my drab past, my night's glorious venture, my present dingy surroundings, noting only that from time to time my cup was refilled with coffee or that a fresh tower of the excellent batter cakes was placed on the table by a silent automaton who never so much as raised her

eyes to me. What I wish to convey is that I ate along in a rapid, absorbed, rather silly way, with apparently no object in view. Egg after egg slid from the platter to my plate, and twice the ham was renewed. Time, seemingly, had stopped its flight; I was eating on in an endless present. So it curiously seemed when at last I was in a condition to indulge in comment.

After I found myself studying each new egg with something like calculation before taking it on my plate, I became aware that I had eaten nearly enough of the ham, and regretfully concluded that I should be unequal to another monument of the cakes. It was in this comparative leisure that I began to recall the curious manner of my host; at first his peculiarity of speech, in that he commenced almost every sentence with an arousing, "Hey!" and then his subtle change of manner when he had addressed me as "Professor." For all his rough exterior he must, I thought, be a keen student of human nature to have looked beneath my disreputable garb and divined that I was not the tramp I undoubtedly seemed to be. It was plain that I must not linger here where my identity might be guessed by so shrewd a chap. As I meditated I finished, though not without an effort, the last of the cakes and waved away new supplies which the woman was dully bringing me. Never in my life had I consumed so much food in so short time, and I felt a lethargy stealing over me which I found it hard to combat. I moved my chair back from the empty table and relaxed in the genial warmth of the room. I bowed my head, closed my eyes, and allowed thrilling impressions of recent events to race madly

through my mind. Before my shut eyes ran a swift series of pictures, enlivened at intervals by the vision of a broad platter goldenly burdened with ham and eggs; anon I heard, faintly, shots and the confused voices of men forgetting themselves in the foulest rage.

I awoke with a start, my body having fallen forward till I was like to pitch headlong from my chair, and saw that I had dozed for some time. At the table I had quitted, my host and his employee, Edward, had finished breakfast and were conversing in low tones. They now glanced around at me and were genial in their greetings.

"I was just speaking of you, old-timer," said the host. "You are a wreck, a down-and-outer, and pretty far gone, too; but the way Joe says you threw yourself last night—maybe you have the makings of a man left in that old hulk yet, if you'd lay off the booze or the dope or whatever it was that got to you. Anyway, I'm half a mind to put you on that run. It's the first time I tried one man on it, and you bet I don't let another go without a side-kicker. What do you say? Joe's brother will take the trip tomorrow, and if you want to go along there's good money in it."

Fortunately I was able to divine the general intention of this jargon. A most attractive sort of employment was being proffered me; I could be out in the open, I could drive a car as swiftly as I wished, and the life, as the encounter of the previous night showed, would not be devoid of incident. While I considered my reply, each man took a toothpick from a small glass vase on the table between them. "I dare say I should find it an agreeable situation," I replied, "and your

offer is the more welcome because it finds me in reduced circumstances."

"I bet they couldn't be reduced any more a-tall," remarked Edward, removing his toothpick for the purpose and shrewdly regarding my shabby attire.

"Quite correct," I assented. "In fact I am at this moment very awkwardly without funds."

"Hard lines, Professor," said the host; and, turning to the other, "Ain't he good, Ed?"

"I will say that he is," remarked Edward, who, it seemed, had somehow picked up a bit of our college slang. But I thought it best to free both their minds of a certain impression. "I am not a professor, as you seem to believe," I said stoutly. "My name is Simms."

Edward again removed his toothpick, leaned forward, and after peering closely at me, said in delighted tones, "Of course it is! As I live, it's my old friend, Addison Simms! Well, well, it's a small world after all!" His words were earnest enough, yet there seemed something waggish in the play of his eyebrows as he uttered them, so I thought it best to deny that I recalled him.

"I cannot remember," I demurred, "ever to have met——"

The fellow would not let me finish. "But of course you remember!" he insisted. "You surely haven't forgotten our meeting at the luncheon given by the Seattle Rotary Club some years ago. Your suit was pressed then, but it's the same old Simms."

I now saw that he was entirely serious, and wishing to avoid explanations that might prove embarrassing, I

thought it best merely to say that I had a wretched memory for faces and that I was extremely sorry his had slipped from my mind.

He took it nicely, I thought, and covered my confusion by saying, "Ah, well, it might happen to any man, and there was such a crowd at that luncheon. Still, Ad, I remember you perfectly. And how are all the Rotary lads?"

Again I was awkwardly placed, but managed to murmur some polite thing while I saw a way to divert him by picking up one of the two curious-looking firearms which our host had placed on the table beside him. "I suppose these are what I found so useful last night," I observed.

"The same," replied the host, "and I want them to have a good cleaning before you go out again."

"They are, surely," I said, "no despicable engines of warfare," and held one before me as on the previous night. Instantly a series of deafening reports ensued—the more tightly I clutched the thing the more vehemently it seemed to spit. Not until it ceased could I seem to drop the weapon, and then I fell back weakly in my chair.

"Hey! What the h——l!" roared the host, who had leaped to his feet and across the room with an agility amazing in one of his build. An acrid smoke palled the room. Edward was again leering waggishly at me. He had not risen, but merely withdrawn his toothpick, which he held poised before him.

It was now we observed that the maid had somehow removed herself outside the room. From the porch one heard a shrill torrent of speech which I recognized

to be in one of the Norse tongues. Our host stepped quickly to the door and ordered her within. "Hey, there," he called, "do you want to bring the coppers [police] upon us?"

She returned timidly, no longer the dull, lethargic person she had been. Her face was eloquent with the liveliest emotions as she set about clearing the table at which we had eaten.

It was now I discovered that a spray of bullets had entered the floor at my feet and I was overwhelmed with confusion. It seemed so rude a requital for the generous hospitality that had been shown me, and I at once offered the most sincere apologies, adding that these weapons seem to be of a curiously sensitive construction. I was about to pick up the other one that lay on the table, but my host with a quick movement reached it before me. "No you don't, Professor," he said. "If you want to lecture take the one you just fired."

"I hope the boys in Seattle never hear about this," remarked Edward, almost as if to himself.

So I told them frankly that until the previous night I had never discharged a firearm in my life and it was not to be wondered at that I should at first be rather inept.

"On the level?" demanded the host.

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"Straight?" he again demanded.

Edward here spoke. "Anyone in Seattle," he said, "will tell you that the word of old Ad Simms is as good as his bond any day."

I was secretly pleased to know that he was at least mistaking me for some reputable person, and I now

said to my examiner, "Do you mean, am I serious in saying that I have never discharged a firearm until last night? If so, I can assure you that I spoke the truth."

"Well, I am——" The fellow was about to curse again, but at that moment the door to the inner room opened and Joe was revealed, his shoulder swathed and his right arm in a sling.

"Anything doing, boss?" he asked weakly.

"Nothing," replied our host. "It was only your side-kick [associate] showing off a little." This made it seem that I had intentionally brought about the late fusillade, but I was too embarrassed to defend myself.

"Ain't he one handy bimbo with them guns?" demanded Joe, casting at me a glance of admiration.

"You have said it," returned the host warmly, "but he's a bit too handy for the job I had in mind. Sorry, old-timer"—he now turned to me—"but I don't think I had better trust you on that job I spoke of. Your trigger finger is not well trained."

"Don't you believe it, boss!" cried Joe from the doorway. "That baby, he's fast company—bing, bing!—he mows them down. I was near to die and needing for help, and he bring me off."

I was, of course, grateful to the honest fellow for this tribute, but I saw now, and admitted as much to the man who had so nearly become my employer, that I was perhaps unfitted for the post in question. "Perhaps later," I added, "when I have had a bit of practice——"

"Exactly," said he.

"If it wasn't for that fast baby," insisted Joe, still

clinging to the doorway, "I'd be out there yet; them guys would have put me in a hole."

The host gestured to him in a friendly manner. "That's all right, Joe; you got winged, and this bozo brought you off; I understand that, and I'll see he gets his. Don't worry, and now get back to bed before you start a fever, like the doc said."

Joe withdrew and the host turned to me, as he did so taking from a side pocket of his rough jacket a tremendous roughly crumpled roll of bank notes. "Now, Professor," he said, "here's where you get your split." And from the outer surface of the roll he began removing bills until he had a handful which he thrust upon me. I was amazed at his action, and protested.

"Really," I said, "I shall not need any large sum, because my wants are simple."

"Take it," he insisted, crowding the bills into my hand. "You saved me a wad of dough [money] last night, and you brought off a game little Portuguese besides. I know it don't do any good to give your kind money—you'll wake up in some dump tomorrow and wonder what you did with it—but take it just the same."

As I stood there staring at the immense sum, Edward arose and made a suggestion. "Take my tip, Addison," he said, "and don't put it all in one pocket. Spread it. And, say, Dick, he ought to have some safety pins."

Dick, the host, at once addressed Tilly. "Hey, there, get us some safety pins, will you?" The maid went to a room back of the kitchen and returned quickly with several of these implements, whereupon they both, with

merry chuckles, pinned bills into many of my pockets, saving only a couple of small denomination which they told me to keep in my trousers pocket. "For carfare and peanuts," said Edward.

"Now that bum suit of clothes is worth money," said Dick, slapping me familiarly on the back, "and any dipper that tries to frisk you will have his work cut out."

Again I tried to express my thanks and my notion that I was being overrewarded for the slight service I had been able to render, but Dick gruffly muttered, "Forget it, sport." He and Edward then conferred over a penciled memorandum, so I did not again protest. It was planned, I learned, that I should accompany Edward to the city, some score of miles distant, he having to motor there to deliver some of the very goods I had helped save from the rascally robbers the night before.

"They got fourteen cases loaded in back," said Dick, "and there's the addresses of the four parties that gets them. You can take checks from all but this one; I ain't dealt with him yet."

"Right you are, boss," said Edward, who had completed his toilet since early morning and was now trimly dressed in a business suit of excellent taste. He was, I felt certain, a competent young man.

When the time for our departure came I went to bid Joe farewell. He was resting comfortably, I gathered, and the poor fellow was not a little moved when I gripped his hand. He wished to know where I was going, but I could tell him nothing definite beyond my intention of visiting, in time, the Rocky Mountains.

"Good," he replied heartily. "Maybe I sometime find you there; I don't forget how you brought me off." I assured him I would remember him kindly and went out to shake hands with Richard, who stood by the motor car giving Edward a final word of direction.

"You are a wonder, Professor," he said at parting; and added rather enigmatically, "When you was good, you must have been very good, I will tell the world."

With Edward at the wheel our car sped out to the highway and presently we were making good time, though he seemed more timid about driving than I would have been after my success of the night before.

"Tell me," I said, as soon as we were well on our way, "why should Dick—or Richard, rather—insist upon addressing me as Professor? Do not think the question an idle one; I have a reason for wishing to know. Is there something in my appearance that explains it? Surely I am garbed like a workingman."

"You surely are, old sport," he answered. "And I don't really know why Richard should address you in that manner unless it is that you wear spectacles. If you took those off your disguise would be perfect; not a soul would ever dream of calling you Professor."

I fell to wondering if indeed so slight an item might wholly alter my looks, but I had not liked the use of his word "disguise," so I changed the subject by inquiring about the worth of the goods I had helped to save. Edward turned to smile upon me. "Worth a lot of dough to Dick," he replied. "Piled in the back here is about a thousand dollars' worth."

At this I wondered about the nature of goods so costly. "Silk?" I ventured.

But Edward answered evasively, "Finer than silk." And with this I was obliged to be content.

Edward spoke later about my life on the road, as he called it, and I was not a little vexed by his calm assumption that I was a victim of the drink habit; yet I saw no way of refuting this without revealing too much about myself.

At ten o'clock we were traversing the outskirts of the city, and ere long we skirted the edge of a vast green park where, it occurred to me, I might pleasantly spend a few hours, so I said as much, and Edward stopped to let me out. I then assured him that I should retain the most pleasant memories of our brief association.

He thanked me and said at parting, "Remember, Bo, you have a bum suit but it is lined with kale. So try to wake up tomorrow with something besides the safety pins upon you. And do not talk to any strangers. So long!"

He drove off with a cheerful wave of the hand, and I crossed the street to a news stand so that I might have reading-matter while I rested in the pleasant park.

CHAPTER IV

THE drug-store news stand had but a meager assortment of periodicals; none that I would have chosen from a proper stock. But I purchased the least frivolous of them and entered the park in search of a nook where I could pass a few pleasant hours undisturbed. I found presently a rustic seat on which I made myself comfortable. My surroundings were conducive to quiet. Birds piped in the trees, a green turf spread away from me, and near by a dozen children played at games while their nurses chatted on another bench. Coming so directly from an atmosphere of tension I relaxed in the idyllic peace of the place and sought forgetfulness in the pages of my periodical.

Soon I was deep in a thoughtful article disclosing that we of America dance above a volcano by reason of our insensate pursuit of pleasure in cabarets, those gilded resorts in which the vicious night life of Paris is reproduced and even overdrawn. Home life, I learned, was now extinct, and we no longer give a thought to the morrow. I was sure I had done well to break from my prison, because this alarming news had never reached Fairwater—or at least my own immediate circle. I had been living in a fool's paradise, and only beyond its bounds could I have learned of the country's peril.

After a time of reading I chanced to glance up, mus-

ing on this dreadful new knowledge I had gained. Down the winding walk that passed before my bench sauntered a terrifying figure all too well known to me; none other than Bertrand Meigs, long since detested as Fairwater's demon alumnus. Even at a considerable distance the slight wiry frame, the loudish suit of checks, the straw hat ribboned with the colors of his college club, the rattan stick—made his identity all too certain. He is an irresponsible person of youngish—far too young—middle age; indeed I believe his was the class of '04; yet each year at commencement time he infests the campus in a striped blazer, and by sheer force of character becomes a leader of all activities. If nothing better offers he will assemble any random group of students and insist with a sort of grim frivolity upon leading them in the college yell. His energy is tireless and he presumes outrageously upon his seniority. I have known him approach our president while in the ceremonial robes of his office, slap him rudely on the back and proffer him a cigar from one of his waistcoat pockets, either of which seems to spout cigars like a fountain. He makes himself equally familiar with other members of the faculty. Me, for example, he has for years addressed as Coppie, even in mixed company, yet of his actual college time I have but the faintest recollection, being positive only that he never majored in history. He is, in short, a busybody, an annual pest, as Fargus Jessup has said. It was Jessup also who first called him the demon alumnus. He has, withal, a kind heart and a sincere interest in the well-being of Fairwater, wherefore much is forgiven him.

As the creature neared me, I bent my head low over my magazine. He passed at a slow saunter and I supposed would not even glance at a person so insignificant as I appeared. Yet, lifting my eyes after he passed, I was chilled to notice that he had half turned and was looking back at me—not with recognition, to be sure, yet with faintly stirred interest. I had the presence of mind not to betray that I observed his look, and presently he resumed his stroll, though more slowly, going on as one in a state of indecision.

I sat motionless, slanting my glance only enough to perceive that a score of yards farther on he again turned to regard me, almost stopping in his tracks as he did so. He found me still inert, but the moment he went on and a bend in the walk brought a stretch of shrubbery to intervene, I was up and footing it briskly in the opposite direction. I saw that the fellow might ruin all. He would have read of my disappearance, and in passing had been stirred by something familiar. I had once heard Fargus Jessup speculate interestingly as to whether this nuisance could have any other occupation than being a Fairwater alumnus; whether, between commencements, he might not hibernate in a cavern or perhaps sew himself up in a cocoon—such being the fashion of Jessup's coarse humor. And now, as I practically fled from the creature, I found myself wishing that if he did have any serious purpose in life, he might be pursuing it instead of making himself objectionable in a public park. However, I saw with relief that he had not turned back, and I was presently in a maze of pathways where he would have found it difficult to trace me.

Following one of these I issued to a compound where wild animals were shut in cages, but as groups of people stood before these I thought it wiser to keep on until I had gained the brow of a hill beyond, where I again hoped to find a secluded bench on which to continue my reading of our country's plight.

Reaching the summit of this rise I saw that a fenced half acre of it was brown and bare and given over to the burrows of what I detected to be prairie dogs, a small American rodent allied to the marmots, many of whom were now erecting themselves rigidly at the mouths of their homes or scampering about in a hurried but aimless fashion. The spot seemed too unattractive to lure onlookers. I sank to rest on a bench overlooking it and again fell to my reading.

It seemed I was not to remain alone, however. Five minutes later a man oddly garbed and of striking appearance strode up the hill and, without noticing me, came not far from my seat and leaned over the fence to regard the rodents. He was tall, and of rather a harsh personality, but what marked him for me was his hat and his hair. The hat was immense, with a spreading brim and high crown, drab in color, and from beneath it the hair hung in ringlets well upon the shoulders of a not too modish coat. The person wore also a voluminous mustache with drooping ends. His face was dark and the eyes showed a saturnine glint under the wide hatbrim. As he leaned there he seemed to be sunk in dejection, staring blankly at the colony of animals, and twice while I regarded him he drew a long sigh.

And now I became more interested in this figure than

in my periodical, for I had identified him with picturesque creatures once observed in a wild Far Western entertainment. He would be of the famed Rocky Mountains, a cowboy or herdsman. In a conversational tone, for he was hanging above the fence hardly ten feet from me, I remarked, "They are a small American rodent allied to the marmots."

At my words he slowly turned, gazed at me quite without interest and asked in a drawl dark with cynicism, "Is that so?" the word "so" being heavily emphasized. He then resumed his listless stare at the animals, paying me no more heed.

He was a wild-looking man, yet I could not avoid thinking his wildness calculated. He seemed a bit unreal, like a person in fiction. Determined, however, to engage him in converse, I addressed him again.

"Perhaps you have not seen this very interesting article in which it is said that we, as a people, are dancing on the volcano's edge in those gilded resorts where the vicious night life of Paris is being reproduced and even overdrawn."

Hereupon the fellow once more turned to regard me briefly, but made no answer and lapsed into his droop of silent dejection.

Again, after a moment I remarked, "Every thoughtful citizen must be alarmed to discover that our home life is becoming extinct—do you not think so?"

This time he sighed drearily, but came over and seated himself by me with something like a groan.

"Quit your kidding, old-timer," he crisply said; and added in a tone of not unkindly inquiry, "Things breaking rotten for you too?"

Being uncertain of the import of this speech I asked, "Do you know the Rocky Mountains?"

"Do I know the Rocky Mountains?" he repeated. "Listen, Bill, I knew them mountains when they wasn't that high." And he held his hand to within a few inches of the paved walk before us. I of course recognized this as a fashion of humorous hyperbole and laughed heartily, whereupon he gestured toward the colony of rodents and went on in a confidential tone, "Say, this here spot is the only spot in the whole town where I can get any home feeling. I just come here and look at them dogs and that stretch of bare ground till I'm likely to break down and sob for homesickness."

As there was a note of genuine melancholy in his tone I thought best to divert him. "Those creatures," I said, "are not, I believe, hunted as game in the Far West. Are they considered, by any chance, good to eat?"

"Good to eat!" he exclaimed with real vivacity. "Say, Bill, I dare you to climb that fence and catch one for me; just bring one here and see what happens, that's all I ask." This, of course, was another of his absurdities of a significance not plain to me, so I made no comment, whereupon he continued, "If I couldn't eat a prairie dog my name ain't Sooner Jackson."

"Sooner Jackson," I repeated, struck by the racy quaintness of it.

"The same," he answered, "and my middle name is Calamity, if anyone should ask you."

This, of course, was improbable, but I was impressed by the singularity of the two names. Then, feeling that he would expect the return courtesy I said, "My own

name is Simms—Addison Simms.” I felt rather than saw him regard me sharply, and in some confusion I added, “From Tacoma.”

The fellow’s eyes lightened and he said, “Don’t you mean Seattle?”

My confusion became more marked and I fear my reply was a bit stammering. “From Seattle originally,” I said, “but Tacoma, which is a near-by city, has been my home for some months.”

The chap now grinned broadly at me, and said, rather wearily, “All right, all right, Bill! Kid me along! Feeling pretty good, ain’t you, like you must have et lately?”

“I ate a very hearty breakfast not so many hours ago,” I admitted. “There was a stupid, sullen-looking maid, Tilly her name was—though she fled when I began to shoot—but she made the most excellent batter cakes I have ever tasted, and the moment I removed a piece of ham from the plate she would put another in its place. Her coffee, also——” I broke off because of the queerness of my listener’s look. It had grown not only fierce but personally threatening. Suddenly his hand closed over my wrist like a gyve.

“Don’t, Bill,” he muttered. “Don’t do it, because I might kill you.” He said the absurd thing so simply that I suddenly saw the truth.

“When did you eat last?” I demanded.

Releasing my wrist he answered in a tone again light, “Yesterday morning at ten o’clock, by daylight squandering, I et the very last of a forty-dollar silver-mounted banjo with jeweled frets, but promise me you’ll never tell a soul. I don’t want to get talked about in a

hick town like this." Such were his actual words, and I had no doubt that hunger had made the man delirious.

"Listen to me quietly, Mr. Jackson," I said. "As I came past that animal reserve below us I noticed a refreshment booth just beyond the cage of panthers—I believe they were panthers—and there seemed to be sandwiches for sale. For reasons of my own I prefer not to go down into that crowd, but I will let you have money if you care to go and purchase food." He seemed to be dazed by this speech; his eyes like those of a wounded animal followed my movements as I reached for the loose money in my trousers pocket. "I am certain there appeared to be sandwiches on the counter," I said, and debated the sum he would need. "How many would you be likely to eat?"

"How many did there seem to be?" he hoarsely demanded, and with a lightning-like swoop of his hand he was off down the hill, taking one of my bills. Now, too late, I reflected that this fellow was doubtless a sharper or confidence man. He had given me an assumed name—Sooner Calamity Jackson was so obviously just that. Edward had been right to warn me against having talk with strangers, and foresighted indeed had he been in suggesting that my money be not all kept in one pocket. Yet while I mused upon the manner in which I had been defrauded I saw that I had done Mr. Jackson an injustice, for he came panting up the incline, a paper bundle in the crook of one arm and carrying a large bottle of milk. As he came his dark curls fluttered backward in the breeze and his long, somewhat severe countenance wore a look of exaltation. He advanced to the seat, put down the bottle of milk, undid the

wrapper of his bundle and, laying a great number of sandwiches between us, began to attack them in almost a bestial manner.

For a considerable time he ate in silence, at intervals sipping from his bottle of milk, and at last, somewhat restored, he reached into a pocket and returned me a handful of silver as change from my bill. Then again he fell to his food, though managing it now in more seemly fashion, and presently with a reviving appetite of my own I joined him, finding the sandwiches indeed not unwelcome.

Observing this he offered to get me a bottle of milk, he having finished his own, but I declined, fearing it would look unbecoming of me to drink milk from a bottle in so public a place. He then suggested another beverage. "They got some of that near-beer down there too. I'll get you a bottle of that if you say so—though it's tame stuff, like kissing your Aunt Hester."

This, too, I declined, and we were presently chatting of life in the Rocky Mountains. I asked him if he had done much panther hunting, but he shook his head, saying he would never hunt them if they did not hunt him; that "Live and let live" was his motto. I told him then of some reading I had done where panther hunts were described, and it was now for the first time that he addressed me as professor, so that I saw my spectacles must again have betrayed me. Determining to throw him off the track, as the saying is, I saw it would be wise to adopt his own ungrammatical lingo, rich in double negatives, contractions and other vulgarisms.

"Listen, Bill," I said, "I ain't no professor nor never was. I am a pretty fast baby and a handy bimbo with

firearms, and last night I knocked off a couple of guys back there."

He stared at me quizzically during this speech and continued to stare a long time after I had finished it with a ring of defiance. Then, to my amazement he said slowly, with his eyes on mine, "Professor, I will venture the assertion that you are one whale of an old liar."

This nettled me and I retorted with some spirit, "You may keep your vile insinuations to yourself, if you please, but it's all true. I knocked off a couple of guys and brought off Joe when they were about to put him in a hole and at this very moment, although I wear a bum or inferior suit, I have a number of dollars of kale in many of its pockets—pinned in so that I may not be frisked except with difficulty."

Mr. Jackson was now staring at me, open-mouthed, rather pitiable in his undoubted confusion. "You win," he said briefly. Then after a careful scrutiny, "And what singed your eyebrows?"

"That occurred," I explained, "when I set fire to the house, the gasoline proving highly inflammable."

Again he fastened upon me his peculiar stare of half-persuaded incredulity. "Well I'll be——" he began, but did not carry the speech to what I am sure would have been its profane end. "You little old murderer—and a firebug too!"

"Promise me not to tell a soul," I said, recalling his own similar request a short time before.

"Don't worry about that, old-timer, but ain't they likely to do something with you? I don't want to pry, but how far away from here was all this ruckus [affair]?"

"Back there," I said, not caring to be more definite, and then recalling the suspicious stare of the Fairwater nuisance, Bertrand Meigs, I added, "I don't mind telling you that a certain man passed me not so long ago in this park who regarded me very suspiciously. In fact he knows me and seemed to recognize me in spite of the fact, which, of course, you could not know, that I am pretty thoroughly disguised."

"Then you better get out of here quick." Mr. Jackson, I was glad to see, no longer thought me a boaster and was becoming alert and businesslike. "I'll tell you——"

At that moment, coming up the path that led past our bench, I saw the gay-hatted head of Bertrand Meigs, who advanced, twirling his stick and glancing right and left. "Hist!" I said to my companion—a word I had gleaned from one of Leffingwell's stories—"there he is again!"

Mr. Jackson saw the figure I indicated, and instantly froze to a frowning abstraction, at the same time demanding skilfully from a corner of his mouth and in a low tone, "Is he a detective?"

Instantly it occurred to me that this might really be the vocation of Meigs, never suspected by us at Fairwater. "I think he is," I answered, and we both appeared to be staring absently in front of us while the figure approached.

As he came before us Meigs halted a bit uncertainly, whereupon I glanced coldly up at him, and my companion did the same. "Hello, Coppie," he hailed me, though I could see he was on his guard.

"I think you have made a mistake," I said shortly.

"Have a cigar," said the intolerable creature, taking one from an upper waistcoat pocket, as usual crowded with them.

I waved the thing off with a gesture of repugnance. "No, thank you," I said severely. But the man would not be rebuffed.

"Say, Coppie, on the level——" he was beginning in his most offensive manner when Mr. Jackson spoke up impatiently.

"On your way, friend; you're hiding the view. This gent you're misnaming is old Pete Johnson from Moose Jaw that married my wife's cousin."

At this the Meigs creature laughed loudly and did one of his abandoned dance steps I had so often witnessed in the Fairwater halls. "Yes, he is!" he cried with gay sarcasm, so that I saw the clever device of Mr. Jackson had not availed and that I must speak for myself.

"I am Addison Simms of Seattle," I said stoutly. "I have never met you and I have seen enough of you to know I should never care to. Let me detain you no longer."

I had thought to freeze the fellow with this, but now he again emitted his offensive laugh and said, "Ah, yes, Mr. Simms, I understand; I understand perfectly. And do you mind telling me if there is any truth in the report that you have become engaged to that poor girl who orders so many chicken salads? If it's true, allow me to congratulate you both. You deserve each other. And so"—he turned as if to go, but paused, leering waggishly at me—"as far as I am concerned—remember—there is as yet no news of the missing man. Foul

play is still suspected." With a final flourish of his stick the intolerable creature returned down the walk, glancing back to laugh in a boisterous and insulting way.

For some moments Mr. Jackson and I sat in silence, I trying to wrest a meaning from the speech about a young lady who ordered chicken salads. It seemed utter nonsense and yet must have been spoken with a purpose. I gathered, too, that Meigs, while practically certain of my identity, had wished to tell me that he would keep his meeting with me secret.

As I reflected thus my companion grasped me by the arm and said explosively, "You poor nut-head, come on out of this. You are no more fit to be left alone than a babe in its mother's arms. For G—'s sake why do you keep springing that stale Simms gag? You come with me and get under cover."

CHAPTER V

EMERGING from the park we walked rapidly to the nearest corner to await a street car, and here Mr. Jackson asked me for the silver he had restored to me. This I readily gave him, and his first act was to hail a street urchin and purchase a newspaper. Handing this to me he directed in a gruff low tone that I hold it before my face continuously. As I took the sheet I glanced back to the park exit and saw Bertrand Meigs issue from it. Almost at once he caught sight of my companion and me and had the impudence to wave his stick at us. I directed the attention of Mr. Jackson to him, who shook his clenched fist at the fellow. Our car coming, he seized my elbow and propelled me to it. Boarding it, we both observed that Meigs still regarded us, and Mr. Jackson again shook his doubled fist, whereupon the detective, as I now did not doubt him to be, waved his stick and his unencumbered hand in a manner that seemed not only care-free but cordial.

Our car started and as we seated ourselves Mr. Jackson savagely remarked, "I should have soaked that bird a plenty when I had the chance."

"I dare say," I replied, not divining the precise meaning of his speech, but feeling its intention to be hostile. I then held the newspaper up before my face as I had been instructed to do, and was shocked to find my glance resting upon a muddled portrait of myself.

Noted Educator Still Missing, was the headline over an account of the futile search for me in the environs of Fairwater. I was glad to see that I was not any longer described merely as "spouse of mayor," although much of the article was devoted to the activities and eminence of Mrs. Copplestone, who, said the screed, "occupies a place of distinction in her unfailing support of cultural things in addition to extensive philanthropic and social-service work, all of which have combined to make her the town's ideal mayor." The dispatch was dated at Fairwater and I had little doubt that Mrs. Copplestone herself had penned it. I presently folded the paper so that this item might not arouse the suspicion of Mr. Jackson.

A long time we rode, penetrating at last a dingier part of the city, and when we alighted in a mean street I was pleased to think that my Nemesis was at last baffled had it been his intention to continue the odious persecution. Also I was glad to remember that should he again come near me while Mr. Jackson was by he would become a soaked bird, which, from the tone of my companion, would seem to be something harshly to his disadvantage. I was beginning to rely greatly upon this strange person who, for all his theatrical surface, seemed devoted to my interests.

Rapidly we walked several blocks along the street in which we alighted, then turned into one of an even meaner aspect, its houses dismal and dilapidated. Into one of the most sordid-appearing Mr. Jackson led me and, after mounting three flights of uncarpeted stairs into a squalor that increased with our ascent, threw open a door of a tiny chamber at the back of the house,

containing an iron bed, a scarred bureau and one decrepit chair.

Closing and locking the door he breathed a long sigh as of relief, and remarked as he surveyed me, "For the nonce that h—l-hound of the law is thrown off, but don't show your face outside this dump till I give you the word. I didn't like the way that bird was acting."

"I dare say he would be much better soaked," I said.

"Trust me," replied my companion grimly, "but I ought to get you out of town, because that bird is probably this minute making his report and every police station here will have your description. However, I have a flash. I got it when we come along in that car. But first I'll have to get some things out of hock, so if you were on the level about that kale, show me."

I saw him to mean that if I had been honest in saying I was in possession of money he would like to see some, so I reached into a convenient pocket and, manipulating the safety pin, brought forth one of my assortments of currency. The eyes of Mr. Jackson lighted eagerly as he took the bills and ran them over with deft fingers.

"Eighty-five," he said, "and I sure beg your pardon, Professor, for having doubted that fairy tale about you being a murderer."

"Bing, bing! I mow them down," I said, recalling Joe's tribute.

"I believe you, I have to believe you. No one gets eighty-five dollars these days for much less than murder."

"I have still more kale, a number of dollars of it," I said, reaching for another pocket, but he stopped.

"This is enough for tonight. Later, I may have a

serious talk with you about the rest, but now I got to hustle out with my tickets."

He opened the door, pausing only to warn me that I must not leave the room, and was off. Again I nursed misgivings about the integrity of Mr. Jackson caused by his description of this abode as a dump. Both Edward and Richard had predicted that I would on the morrow awaken in a dump with nothing but my safety pins left. Now I was in what Mr. Jackson himself frankly admitted to be a dump, and I had intrusted him with a considerable number of kales. Resolving to face the situation calmly, however, I picked up my newspaper and, having crumpled its first sheet into a ball, searched its remaining columns in the hope that I might find further particulars of the frightful degeneracy that menaced America's home life. But, as I have so often remarked about our public press, it ignores the gravest of our problems for the petty round of murders, robberies, official corruptions at our national capital and the scandals of the ill-mated. Aside from the account of my own disappearance there had been little of real interest in the sheet.

As I threw it down in some disgust for its trivialities a knock sounded on the door, and in answer to my call a young man entered briskly. He was a slim youth rather carefully attired and wearing a cap pulled down over a pair of gray eyes that had a curious effect of being constantly watchful.

Seeing that the room was empty save for me, he remarked in a friendly manner, "I thought Sooner was here. Didn't I hear his step a while ago?"

"You perhaps did," I rejoined, "but Mr. Jackson

has gone out on some errands. It is possible, however, that he will return after a time."

"After a time, eh?" said the young man genially, and added, "Is the old bird still up against it or has he made a killing?"

I instantly now perceived that it must be a fashion of speech among these men to refer to human beings as birds, but I was puzzled by the remainder of his speech. However, the boy had an ingratiating manner, so I thought to satisfy him.

"I do not know," I answered, "what Mr. Jackson may be against, but in any event I doubt if he would resort to murder. It is true that he lately spoke of soaking a bird, but I do not think he would have gone to the extreme of killing him. He merely hustled out with his tickets after I had given him some of my kale."

The young man was now regarding me steadily with a somewhat bewildered glance. After a moment he paced twice across the narrow room, humming lightly. Then after readjusting his rich cravat in its broken mirror, he came to rest by leaning against the edge of the dresser. From this position he eyed me pleasantly and said, "Some of your kale—I believe you said you gave him some of it?"

"Yes," I replied. "I was about to give him more, but he declined it, saying he had already enough for his present purpose." Again the youth paced across the room, humming lightly. He made a conventional remark about the weather and absently took from the pocket of his well-cut coat two small objects which I did not at first recognize. With these he began to play on the dresser top and appeared to have forgotten me.

At length he glanced up at me apologetically, saying, "I beg your pardon, sir, but I became engrossed with an interesting little game I have just found. I noticed a chap playing it on the street today and it simply fascinated me, so I bought a set of the implements for a few cents. You will see how simple they are." He held up to me what I now saw to be merely the two detached halves of an English-walnut shell and a small pellet of some composition I could not identify. "It is most interesting," he went on, turning again to put his toys on the dresser top. "If you will step here I shall be glad to show you the game."

I left my seat on the iron bed and went to watch the young enthusiast. It was indeed a simple game, a mere matter of deftly manipulating the two shells so that the onlooker should be uncertain as to which of them lay over the pellet. I saw at once what the object of the player would be and observed that the youth could not yet have mastered sufficient skill to make the contest other than one-sided. I frankly pointed out that he was doing the thing clumsily, and he took my comment in such good spirit, showing not the least sign of offense, that I could not help liking him.

"I know I can't do it well, yet," he confessed, "but you should have seen that chap on the street. He deceived me almost every time. Now, let me see—how did he do it?" And taking the pellet and the two shells he again manipulated them, but still so clumsily that I had no difficulty in picking the correct shell. Somewhat chagrined, he hopefully tried again, and once more I was able to follow the movements of his fingers. Several other attempts he made to baffle my quick eye,

and when each time I picked the shell concealing the pellet he became rather piqued and, declaring that the quickness of his hand would yet deceive my eye, he again went through his clumsy motion, and turned pridefully to me with the boast, "Now you are fooled. This time I have succeeded."

I assured him, however, that he had not and was about to pick up the proper shell when he restrained me. "One moment," he remarked. "I am so sure I have fooled you this time that I would be willing to wager a few dollars upon it. What do you say to that?"

Now I knew he had been clumsy again and that the pellet lay under the shell to his right, but thinking to teach him a good lesson, I cried, "Willingly!" meaning, of course, to give him back such money as he might foolishly stake and lose to me.

"Good!" he replied, and taking some notes from his pocket he looked at me inquiringly. "How about a ten-spot [ten dollars]?" he inquired, and as I had one of these bills at hand I heartily agreed, laying my own bill on the table and picking up the right shell.

My astonishment may be surmised when I say that the pellet was not there, where I had distinctly seen it placed. My opponent smilingly lifted the other shell, proving, indeed, that my eye had been deceived.

I was now concerned about the young man, for I knew that only an accident had served him, and I immediately proposed that we make other wagers so I might presently prove to him that he was not sufficiently master of the game to hazard his money on it. He seemed rather loath at first, but, in response to my urg-

ing, at last consented, suggesting that we double the stakes. To this I gladly agreed, and I was reaching to unfasten another safety pin when our door opened and Mr. Jackson entered, his arms full of bundles.

My young friend glanced around at him in some annoyance and instantly closed his hand over our first stake. Mr. Jackson, although he seemed not to notice this movement, dropped his bundles on the bed, came over to the youth, grasped the hand that still held the two notes, extracted one of them and lightly flicked the wrist above it, saying, "Naughty, naughty, Harold!"

Although I was aghast at the rudeness of this performance, my injured young friend merely grinned at his assailant not unamiably, although he remarked as he paused at the still-open door, "I wish you had broken both legs coming upstairs." This, of course, must have been said in jest, but before I could expostulate at the treatment he had received the speaker had gone and Mr. Jackson was eying me severely.

"Was that your first bet?" he demanded.

"It was," I replied, "although I had just prevailed upon the young man to make another at double the stakes when you so roughly spoiled our game. And I wish you to understand clearly that I was not trying to fleece the lad. He is very clumsy at the game, this being the first time he has tried to play it. After showing him that he should not risk money on his skill—it was by the merest accident he won our first wager—I meant to return his losings with a few words of wholesome advice. As you have prevented me from doing him this service I make no doubt he will fall into the hands of people less considerate."

Mr. Jackson had again stared at me in his curiously steadfast manner during this speech—which I meant him to take as a rebuke for his interference. He continued to stare a long moment after I had finished. Then he came to me and warmly grasped my hand, which he shook at length, to my great bewilderment. Presently he held me away from him and again surveying me, spoke.

“Professor,” he began, “in my forty years some very wondrous things have happened to me, but never anything like you. I really don’t know what I have done to deserve you. And I see now that you are indeed the person you have claimed to be. You are beyond a doubt Mr. Addison Simms, of Seattle. That’s just as easy to believe as the rest of you.”

I now surveyed him in my turn. “Your speech is not clear to me, Mr. Jackson, and yet I feel a confidence in you not warranted by your manner. In short, sir, you are an enigma to me, even though I rely upon you.”

“That’s just what I wanted to say about you,” he replied, “only I couldn’t think of that word. But I am glad you rely upon me. And further, I am about to put your confidence to a severe test. For your own good I want you to come clean with whatever kale you have left; you have mentioned a number of safety pins, and I am afraid one of them might work into your old hide and cause appendicitis.”

Seeing that I was quite at the man’s mercy and still, moreover, feeling the confidence I had expressed, I proceeded to disburden myself of the bank notes secreted about my person. As I removed them Mr. Jackson

placed them in a pile on the bed, skilfully counting them as he did so.

When I had removed the last note he sighed and remarked, "I certainly am the original bobbed-haired bandit. What lovely picking you would have been for Harold and his trained shells. And if you hadn't met him you would tomorrow have been buying the city hall. Let me warn you now, should you again come into money, not to buy that property. I admit the offer is temptingly made; I have known the city hall to go for as little as two hundred dollars if that was all the bird had, but promise me you will never buy it."

Despite the obscure wording of this speech I felt somehow that a true devotion to my interests underlay it. Without misgiving I saw Mr. Jackson roll my bills into one lot and stow them in a pocket. Only then I remembered my old precaution.

"I ought to tell you," I said, "it was long since made a rule that I keep one bill constantly pinned in this upper left-hand pocket, in case I should find myself utterly without money, as has happened."

Mr. Jackson withdrew my money and took a bill from it. "Very well," he said, "I'll let you keep this one if you'll promise to forget which pocket it's in, and especially promise not to wager it on the game of that Harold boy that rooms across the hall. Your intentions were noble, but let him learn his own lesson in his own way. Do you promise, cross your heart?" I made him the promise and felt relieved to know that I was not entirely penniless.

Mr. Jackson continued, but no longer in his manner of stern helpfulness. "Now listen, Bill——" he was

beginning; but I did not relish this sobriquet and resolved to confide in him moderately.

"I will," I said, "as a mark of confidence, tell you that my Christian name is Algernon."

He emitted a gasp of astonishment, and said, "There, now, wouldn't you know it? You couldn't be named anything else, could you? All right, Al, and I want to say that, for all I have existed for years, I never really lived until I met up with you. I ask you to believe this on my word of honor as a British officer. But, meantime, I again ask you to listen while I try to get some sense into that run-about bean [quick mind] of yours." I saw he was serious, and, although even then I doubted him to be a British officer, I prepared to listen.

"In the first place, that central-office bird may have located us. As I came out of the hock shop with that plunder I saw him in the distance coming my way. I beat it for the corner, turned and lingered in the first hallway and, sure enough, he come by in about one minute, straining his silly head up to look into the crowd beyond him. Some day that bird is going to suffer a lot from me, but of course I couldn't pull anything there. I let him go on, then ducked out and went the other way, quirting myself a-plenty. And I made this dump without sighting him again. But it looks serious. I wouldn't put it past him to be here any minute with a couple of bulls [companions] to make a pinch. But I'm going to stand by you, Al. I don't know what your gunplay was about, and don't want to know. If you knocked off a couple of guys I don't need to be told they was needing it. I know you never pulled a trigger you wasn't justified in pulling."

"It was wrong of me to pull that trigger in Richard's kitchen," I protested.

"Never mind that, and don't try to tell me anything. All I want to do is to get you out of here before they nab you. So first I'm going to change that map for you." I looked about, but could perceive no map in the apartment. "I mean your face," explained Mr. Jackson. "Just now it's a face no one but a mother could love, but this smart plain-clothes boy saw right through it, so I'm going to make it harder for him."

Saying this he undid one of the bundles on the bed, took from it the apparatus for shaving, and was presently stropping a razor. When he had done this he took a pitcher and was gone, returning a moment later with hot water. Preparing a lather he directed me to rub it well into my stubble of beard and this he kept me doing for a long time. "The more you rub the less it'll feel like your rind was coming off," he explained. When all was to his satisfaction he bade me seat myself in the chair and bend my head back, whereupon he took his razor and began to shave my face. I was at once glad I had rubbed in the lather so well, because even now the process was painful in the extreme. Either Mr. Jackson was not a skilled barber or his blade was imperfect. More than once I flinched when my skin was cut. Mr. Jackson handsomely acknowledged his ineptness, saying, humorously, that his rightful place was out at the stockyards, but he at length finished the task and stanchd the blood flow in the several places needing it.

Then he exclaimed, "There, it makes you look at least twenty minutes younger," and, cautioning me to re-

main as I was, he brought a bottle from the bed and began to apply what I believed to be a healing lotion. He was thorough in this, applying it even to the lids of my eyes after he had directed me to close them.

"So far, so good," he remarked, surveying me as an artist might his canvas. "Tomorrow I'll second-coat you." He then rummaged among his curious belongings on the bed and affixed to me something I took to be a close-fitting cap, after which he demanded that I regard myself in the mirror.

I looked, and received a shock. I had known full well that the lines of my face would be unfamiliar, they having been hidden for thirty years, but I had not been prepared for the other effects my companion had achieved. My face was darkly stained and on my head was a raven wig of coarse hair falling in two braids before my shoulders. Needless to say, I would not have known myself; not a lineament was familiar and I seemed of another race.

"Heap big Injun!" exclaimed Mr. Jackson, as if pleased with his handiwork, and I saw that I did indeed resemble one of our aboriginal red men with high cheekbones and a nobly jutting nose.

"Chief Ugwalalla!" again exclaimed Mr. Jackson in delight, and ordered me to remove my clothing. When I had done this he brought me other garments, trousers of fringed buckskin, a shirt of the same, profusely beaded in blue and white, an elaborately feathered head-dress and moccasins, all of which he insisted that I don. To please the honest fellow—albeit a little hesitantly—I did so, and again surveying myself in the glass I was compelled to admit that my effect was rather tremen-

dous, especially after I received the long-stemmed pipe which Mr. Jackson filled with tobacco and lighted for me.

"Now," my companion astonishingly said, "I want you to perform for this crowd of palefaces the sacred medicine dance of the Ugwalallas." I understood that his reference to a crowd of palefaces was more of his somewhat cheap humor, but I saw that he was serious about the dance, so I had to protest that I had made no studies of the customs of this or any other tribe of our Indians and could not oblige him.

"Nonsense!" he retorted. "Lift your feet up quick like you was standing on a hot stove and go round in little circles." Wishing to please, I tried this and soon received applause for my efforts.

"You'll do it!" he cheered. "You got the step, and now you must grunt in time with the dance—this way." And Mr. Jackson himself proceeded to dance, accompanying himself with guttural ejaculations, partly like grunts and somewhat like the lowing utterance of our domestic bull.

"Do it that way," he urged, and now from the bed he lifted a banjo and began to beat time on its drum-like head. To this I stepped the dance and reproduced the sounds he had made as best I could. When I finished, in a profuse perspiration, he clapped me heartily on the shoulder with "Fine, Al! You're the best Indian this side of Indianapolis. And remember you don't know a word of English; all you can say of it is 'Ugh, ugh! Me heap big chief!' Go on, say it."

"Ugh, ugh," I repeated, "I am a heap big chieftain."

"No, no—nothing like it!" My companion here be-

trayed his first real impatience with me. "You said it like a d—d professor. Now, like this; talk it way down in your stomach, and for Pete's sake don't say 'I am a big chieftain.' Even the little tots would give you the laugh. Now then—"Ugh, ugh, me heap big chief!" "

As best I could, then, I rendered the silly phrase and after repeated effort and under severe correction I finally achieved the tone and diction he strove for.

"That's enough lesson for tonight," he said at last, "so now let's eat. Whereupon he placed on the dresser top some tins of sardines—fish's pups, he quaintly termed them—a loaf of bread, some cheese, a fruit pie and a bottle of milk, and we ate as we stood there, he explaining that it would have been unwise to venture out for food, even in my present perfect disguise. He had, it seemed, formed a deep respect for the sleuthing skill of our pursuer and would take as few risks as possible until we were beyond the reach of his cunning.

When we had eaten, Mr. Jackson rolled a cigarette with tobacco and paper, took up his banjo and, sitting on the bed to tune it, was presently singing in a rough but not unpleasant voice. They were songs I had not before heard; many of them seemed trivial indeed, full of meaningless exclamations which he delivered with painful grimaces. After I had listened to a few of these I commended his skill upon the instrument but said that my own preference in songs was for something a bit more serious, something with perhaps more purpose than the ones he had sung. He strummed idly upon the banjo and at first I fancied he had not heard my criticism, yet presently he glanced up, his fingers still caus-

ing twinkles of notes to sound, and remarked, "Naturally you would prefer something serious; it's just like you. Well, how about this one?" And he began another song in a higher key which was quite effective and intended, I saw, to be rich with pathos, as it ran:

A young man was on trial for the stealing of a hack,
He had been caught red-handed and for him it did look
black.

But when his dear old mother heard her son was back in
jail,

She hastened to the court room—she looked so white and
pale.

The recital continued rather effectively to the mother's final appeal to the gruff judge not to make her boy a felon. I saw it must be a folk song, crudely worded and forthright, like many of the old English ballads, and my applause was sincere.

Mr. Jackson acknowledged this simply, saying, "I was sure that would touch your heart, Al." But he did not sing again. After idly fingering his instrument for some moments he suddenly glanced up at me and said in an odd voice, "Boy, you don't know it, but you are half owner in one of the sweetest little two-man medicine shows west of Pittsburgh."

CHAPTER VI

THE following day proved to be rich in educational values, bringing me, as it did, in closer touch with the curiously patterned personality of Mr. Jackson and enlarging my apprehension of the novel enterprise in which we were about to engage. "A show of medicine" had somehow suggested merely the laden shelves of an apothecary, whereas I was to learn that it meant something vastly different in the racy vernacular of my companion.

I slept soundly in a bleak chamber across the hall, adjoining one occupied by the youth called Harold, Mr. Jackson conducting me to it and extracting a promise that, should this lad arouse me in the night and suggest another jolly game of shells, I would instantly scream for help. Happily I was not disturbed and came to our breakfast after a reviving rest. We ate again from the dresser, having the remains of our overnight food and a pot of coffee which Mr. Jackson had rustled [obtained] below stairs from the woman conducting the lodging-house. When we had done I was second-coated with the stain, and after my wig was adjusted I felt an assurance that neither Mrs. Copplestone nor even the repulsive but keen-eyed Meigs could take me for anything but the aboriginal I seemed to be.

Mr. Jackson, too, seeming to find my disguise satisfactory, now acquainted me with our plans and mode of

travel. He was the owner, it appeared, of a motor car, which he described as a tin Elizabeth, held by a neighboring garage as security for a bill of repairs. This bill he would pay and, after making some necessary purchases and getting all in readiness, we two would leave the city as soon as night had fallen. I was not in the meantime to venture from the house, lest my whereabouts be revealed to the detective. By midday, as we ate our buffet luncheon, Mr. Jackson, having made two shopping expeditions, informed me that all went well. The detective had not been encountered, to my companion's professed annoyance, because he now meant, should the meeting occur on a side street, to soak [assail] him and thus perhaps discourage his officious meddling.

It was at odd moments during the day, as now, when we chatted after luncheon while Mr. Jackson smoked his cigarette, that I came to a better appreciation of this strange man and the lifework that had become for him almost an obsession. He had, it seemed, many years previous while traveling among the famed Rocky Mountains, saved the life of an aged Indian chief, who in gratitude revealed to him the formula for a wonderful potion that almost miraculously cured a wide range of ailments. Though compounded of simple herbs and barks, the secret of its preparation had been jealously guarded by the aged chief until the gallant behavior of Mr. Jackson melted his stoicism. Before imparting the priceless formula, however, the chieftain obliged my companion to swear that he would devote his remaining years to putting the remedy within reach of all white sufferers.

The oath had been kept. I could not doubt this as my companion in narrating the incident became really impassioned, rising to heights of oratory that I found truly affecting, while his dark eyes glowed with the earnest, almost fanatic light of one dedicated to the relief of human misery. Indeed, I now assured myself that beneath his theatrical exterior, his at times almost flip-pant manner, his infelicities and obscurities of speech, his ballads of an inconsequent and often frivolous type—there beat a heart of gold. As to these songs of his, to be sure, I presently learned that he condescended to them merely as a means of engaging the herd, many of whom, although needing his potent herbal compound, would yet be repelled by worthier music, and so lose the chance of a lifetime.

For in a very literal way Mr. Jackson had kept his promise to the aged chieftain. Again and again urged by wealthy investors to form a company which would manufacture and market the remedy in large quantities, he had foreseen that this step would inevitably result in a deterioration of the compound. Though the formula was simple as to ingredients, their assembling required the nicest care, and he, loyal and forthright soul, had steadfastly resolved that the standard should not be lowered—this at sacrifice of the immense fortune inevitably his had his conscience permitted him to sanction factory methods and quantity production.

Now, too, I learned how my friend had become reduced to the plight in which I found him the day before. His former side-kick [business associate] had been an Indian named Rafferty, who in a near-by town had fallen from a wagon and also become intoxicated to a

point where he had sought to avenge the wrongs of his people upon a crowd gathered for the purpose of listening to the songs of Mr. Jackson—for the man, it seemed, sang in public on his journeys like a troubadour of old. In his maniacal inebriety the Indian had severely wounded several bystanders before Mr. Jackson and others could overpower him, and was later, after some days in the alcoholic ward of an institution, confined for a period of six months in a hoosegow [sanitarium]. All this had entailed legal expense in order to save Mr. Rafferty from a trial for attempted homicide and perhaps a greatly longer period of confinement. Before the proceedings were over Mr. Jackson had not only expended all his surplus but been forced to part with many of his more intimate belongings.

“Poor old Mike,” he said as he ended the account. “He was as good an Indian as I ever worked with while he stayed on the wagon. But let him get a few jolts [glasses] of the wrong kind of hooch [liquor] and the wrongs of Ireland got between him and his work. The least remark from some gink [person] in the crowd would set him off. And I never did get back the tommyhawk he worked with. They took it for evidence. And they still got it. But at that, we come off lucky.”

This showed the genial optimism of my friend, it being his way to look on the bright side of any calamitous happening. His money gone and his car held for a repair bill, he had cheerfully searched for another side-kick with a modest capital, and though not a religious person he regarded his meeting with myself as nothing short of providential. Later I asked why Mr. Rafferty, an Indian, should have been incensed by the

wrongs of another people, only to learn that it was a great kindness of heart unable to brook oppression wherever found. Such being the man whose place I had to fill, I resolved to put forth my best efforts. The work was a worthy one, and its object—the relief of human misery—would excuse the masquerading deception I was about to practice. Also, I did not forget, it would put me beyond the impish attentions of the detective, Meigs.

The remainder of our day was a time of bustling preparation for what my companion termed our get-away. He was constantly remembering new purchases that must be made or articles to be retrieved from the loan offices where trifling sums had been advanced on them. Such was his distraction, it was not until late in the afternoon that he bethought himself of his stock of the magic remedy which he must procure from a chemist who would compound it under his personal supervision. Later he informed me that the stuff had been obtained and loaded in the tin Elizabeth. On this trip, also, he regained possession of a portmanteau of clothing and several striking pieces of jewelry; a watch, a chain of heavy golden links to which was attached, as a charm, a huge nugget of pure gold from a mine he had once nearly owned, a scarfpin in the form of a beetle fabricated from brilliants, and a finger ring set with a stone of great luster which must have been worth a considerable sum. These ornamental items restored to his equipment, with an effect noticeable yet not repellent, as it might have been in a creature of less vital power, Mr. Jackson was far from being the victim of melancholy I had found him when he suffered nostalgia at

beholding prairie dogs. He was now uplifted, and prophesied a rosy future for us both.

At six o'clock he returned from his final trip, announcing that all was ready for our start. He brought with him the materials for our supper and we ate most enjoyably.

Our repast over, Mr. Jackson, having made and lighted his cigarette, informed me that at a certain period of the lecture which he delivered he would speak some words to me in the Indian tongue to which I must respond in the affirmative, after which he would announce to his crowds my willingness to address them briefly in my native language concerning the merits of the curative he offered. I failed at first to comprehend his meaning, because he well knew that I was ignorant of the Indian language, but it seemed that all this talk would be a deception, though justified, indeed, by the end in view. Without difficulty I learned the few guttural syllables to signify my acceptance of the invitation to speak, but he and I were for some moments at a loss for my address which was to follow. This would last not more than three minutes, said my tutor, and might be reduced to two, but I must devise a fashion of vocables for it that would be unintelligible yet seem to be in the red man's tongue.

"Can't you fake something?" suggested Mr. Jackson at last. "You know—just some sort of gibberish—uglywugly monomombush kashawatskie, so on and so on; just do a spiel, but do it with real acting so the hicks [suburbanites] will think they're getting the real gazukus [authentic speech]."

Anxious to please, I tried this device, but found my-

self awkward at it. I could, in truth, assemble meaningless syllables, but I found their repetition would be purely mechanical; I could warm them with no passion. And this rather piqued me because—I who have lectured for thirty years may say it without vainglory—I have ordinarily an effective platform presence and my delivery is conceded to be not unimpressive. But though I tried again the meaningless jumble, finding it still cold, I had a flash of inspiration.

“Eureka!” I cried. “Why not address the hicks in a real language, yet one they could by no possibility comprehend? By doing this, by quoting remembered vigorous passages, I could infuse into them a warmth that would, with the unlearned, cause them to pass for superb gazukus.”

“As how?” demanded my friend, somewhat skeptical, I could perceive. “You couldn’t spring Dutch or Swede or Wop out in these kerosene camps [settlements of less than three thousand population] because you’d get the horselaugh [be derided] in a split second [immediately].”

I was most enjoyably thrilled by this speech. For two days I had been, not unwillingly, looking up to the man; now he must look up to me.

“My dear fellow,” I said, and I saw him wince under the lash of my superior manner, “I am surely not so green, as you would call it in your slang, as to suppose a modern language would not be understood hereabouts. What I meant was——” And to his utter confusion I dashed into a Vedic hymn that I chanced to remember, intoning it rather well, I have no doubt, since it is a thing I have liked.

Before I had half done I saw the good fellow's eloquent face suffused with a glow of amazed admiration. Bursting into hearty applause, he leaped up and shook my hand.

"Professor," he exclaimed joyously, "I got to hand it to you! You sound more like an Injun than any I ever heard." He regarded me wonderingly. "Is it a real language—on the level?"

"One of the oldest," I assured him. "Or perhaps you would prefer——" And I did him a medley of Greek iambics. Again he was overjoyed, and assured me that this, too, was skookum [gazukus].

It might be an unworthy emotion, but I was distinctly aware of not being displeased that I had won the man's admiration and even a certain measure of awe. It was as well, I considered, that he should suspect me to be, in my own world—the real world of intellectual affairs—a person not without weight. For some time he listened in a trance of delight, as I recited various fragments of verse or prose in tongues strange to him yet quite obviously gazukus.

"You know, Al," he said impressively at last, "I can make something out of you. This is serious. You don't want to be a down-and-outer all your life, do you? All right, then; stick by your Uncle Cedric and he'll have you sitting pretty. There's a lot of ways I could put you over. Say I'm doing a hypnotic act and have you for a horse. You're just a bum [mental defective] I pick out of the crowd, and Pete knows you can look the part without any great trouble. I put you under control and have you spouting Greek and Latin and Swiss and all them college lingos in no time, and I get

a professor to keep tabs on you and tell the crowd you're on the level—say! I can see good takings ahead once we get beyond the scene of your late crimes." He stopped to regard me with an approval in which I could feel a genuine liking. "Stick by me, old bean [friend], and I'll have you on your feet again."

At this I thanked him warmly, his intention was so plainly benevolent. I thought, however, that to play the part of an Indian would tax my histrionic powers. I was not yet ready to masquerade as a horse, nor did I ask how any reasonable semblance to one could be achieved.

"I am sure, Mr. Jackson," I said, "that you have my best interests at heart, and I, for my part, will endeavor to succeed in any rôle you allot me, perhaps some day even in that of a talking quadruped."

"Only you got to lay off the booze [alcoholic liquor]," he insisted. "Just remember this—no booze fighter ever won a decision."

Now I had already once or twice assured him that I was not a dipsomaniac, but as he seemed set in the contrary belief I merely promised him that I would at no time indulge in stimulants to excess, and on this we shook hands. Even then I could see that my friend still doubted the fiber of my resolution. It showed in his look. Somewhat vexed, I sharply told him, "And, though you remain incredulous, I reiterate that never in my life have I been a victim of drink."

Scanning my face keenly he seemed at last convinced, but flew to another conclusion that quite mystified me. "Well, maybe it is not the demon rum," he granted; "in fact, with all this talk of yours about a criminal

record you sound a lot more like something else, so promise me this: promise me to lay off the stem or else roll them small."

This was obscure, but I saw it would save time, so I conceded the unmeaning assurance.

"Promise," he went on, "not to hitch up the faithful old reindeers and drive out into a snowstorm."

"I promise even that," I said again, it being plain from his serious manner that I was being asked to forgo some deleterious indulgence.

"Well, I got to trust you," he allowed, "but remember also that I will be riding herd on you." And with these mysterious words we ceased to discuss the supposed reasons for a man of perhaps unusual attainments being in my present position. I saw this simple soul could not be made to understand how one might so ardently long to escape from an environment grown intolerably irksome that he would abandon all former standards of living and seek to lose his identity in the dark purlieus of the underworld.

Throughout that day, although my companion had been much in the streets, he had caught no glimpse of our detective, so it was agreed that we had at last baffled him. This being so, Mr. Jackson decided that we might safely leave at once instead of waiting until midnight as we had planned. Accordingly at ten o'clock he set off for the garage and a short time later bustled back with the announcement that all was ready.

"The old lady is downstairs, oiled, gassed, watered and pawing the ground," he said. Twice he descended with bundles and bags for the car, and when he had gathered the remaining articles for his third trip he

turned to survey me. I had an old hat of his own pulled low over my wig and was enveloped in an overcoat he had provided, its collar meeting the hatbrim and leaving but a scanty exposure of my dark face. "You'll do," he declared. Then opening the door he motioned me to precede him, saying, "And now, Dangerous Dan McGrew, out into the icy night with you!"

With a good deal of trepidation I passed from the shelter of our doorway to the chugging motor car, more than half expecting to be confronted by the odious Meigs, who would maliciously address me as Coppie and proffer me one of his cigars. So fearful was I that I went with bowed head, looking neither to left nor right, until I was seated in the car. There, permitting myself muffled glances, I perceived that my fears had been groundless. The street was deserted save for a few pedestrians in the distance, and I sat in a great relief while Mr. Jackson bestowed his remaining bundles. His car had no top and was heavily laden, the tonneau being piled high with luggage and both running-boards having boxes strapped to them.

When all was to his satisfaction my companion took the driver's seat and with a low warning to keep my map [countenance] covered we got under way. It was good to breathe the fresh air again. Our apartment had been ill-ventilated, and the cigarettes of Mr. Jackson had made the place oppressive. The night was balmy, the car ran smoothly—"Not a sour note in her," said the owner—and I looked forward to a glad release from confinement. From our own street we turned without incident into another of a similar character, Mr. Jackson, although driving with care, managing

constant side glances for such pedestrians as passed us.

And then, at the very moment when I felt that our pursuer had been foiled, I beheld a figure loitering on a lighted corner we approached. It was wrapped in an ulster of voluminous folds, but the straw hat with the tricolored ribbon was disconcertingly familiar, and a light rattan stick protruded from a side pocket of the ulster. All doubt was banished when the figure suddenly did an aimless little dance step, as if it had suffered from and thus relieved a fleeting spasm. Too late I saw we had slowed to make the turn at this corner, and before I could give a warning the cordially silly face of Bertrand Meigs became alive with joy. Again he executed the dance step, laughed aloud as an idiot might have, and taking the stick from his pocket waved at us what I saw to be a pennant with Fairwater in white letters on its blue background. As we turned, the loathsome creature reached for an upper waistcoat pocket as if by instinct, and the familiar gesture told me that he would a moment later have been inviting me to smoke.

"Hist!" I exclaimed, but Mr. Jackson had seen the detective and was already speeding his car. I did not look back, nor had I by the least sign acknowledged the impudent salutation of our enemy. But I was confident that he still danced on the corner and waved his pennant and cackled his senseless glee—probably held out his accursed cigar. Mr. Jackson was meanwhile speaking in the most indescribably profane manner. Even I, who seldom use an oath, was provoked out of myself. "The deuce take the follow!" I cried.

"Now we got to look out for a pinch [arrest]," growled my companion. "Or maybe they haven't got

the goods [legal evidence] on you and will only trail us." He continued to drive at the full legal speed and perhaps a bit faster.

Without confiding to the good chap more than I wished, I could not explain that I chiefly feared our enemy because of the gossip he would purvey to Fairwater. With his present knowledge of my whereabouts made public, the Leffingwell house and my abandoned clothing would have been destroyed all in vain. And yet back in the park that first day Meigs had seemed to intimate that my secret would be guarded by him. I now concluded that what I had often suspected about this person must indeed be truth; that he was simply of a weak mind, a mental defective—in short, as Mr. Jackson would put it, a bum. This would explain his impish antics at each Fairwater commencement, his offensive familiarity with faculty members, his senseless dancing, singing of college glees, leading of yells, his incessant offering of cigars, his apparent delusion that he was the spirit of our college incarnate—in short, all those insane activities that each year made him a campus pest. But, of unsound mind, he was more to be dreaded. One would be unable to calculate him.

We did not speak until we had safely reached the outskirts of the city. Here in a sparsely lighted suburb Mr. Jackson halted at the roadside and extinguished our lights, waiting to see if our tormentor would have followed. But when no car came by during the next half hour we agreed that for the time we were safe.

"Furthermore," said my companion, "I don't see how we can be located again, unless that bird is a mind-

reader; and at that he's got his work cut out, because even I don't know where we're going except in a general way. But I admit he's got my goat [caused me to feel annoyed]. I wouldn't be surprised to see him spout out of the ground in front of the car there this minute. Next to you, Al, he's the hottest human surprise I ever suffered."

I now ventured to communicate my conviction that the creature was not in full possession of his faculties. To this Mr. Jackson instantly agreed. "Sure, he's a nut [mentally unsound], but he needs cracking, all the same. All I ask is one fair chance to work on him."

We drove on. Being now where traffic was not heavy we went rapidly and I was soon forgetting the insufferable Meigs in my enjoyment of our progress. Again I was out in an open night of stars, care-free, the earth gliding by unregarded, and hampered by no petty restrictions imposed by self-appointed guardians. It was good to be off to a destination which we knew only in a general way; it gave me a sensation of pricking stimulus—enjoyed, alas! by only a superior few who dare cross the fearsome boundary of that fourth dimension. I was conscious of wishing that Jessup might hear a certain far-off brazen bell and even through the distance know the hand that clanged it.

CHAPTER VII

TWICE more during the night we stopped to see if we might be pursued. But apparently at last we had gone beyond the maddening surveillance. Again as on another night—actually so recent, but appearing to be in a remote epoch—I watched the silent, slow magic of dawn. Moment by moment the light spread about us and by its earliest gray diffusion I saw we traversed a gently rolling area devoted to the several branches of agriculture. Birds awoke from their sleep in hedgerows and the scent of May blossoms delighted my nostrils.

From time to time we passed farmsteads where a single tall tower, stark with a Greek simplicity, loomed in the growing light. My companion said that these were silos, and I was content with hearing the musical name. Though doubtless they serve a utilitarian purpose I have never learned what this may be, nor shall I ever wish to. It seemed to me that these daringly chaste structures had been named by a singer and might well have been erected for their beauty alone.

As dawn grew we observed farm laborers come cheerily forth to their tasks, and saw stout horses, arrayed in harness, being led from capacious barns. The world had roused itself for another day of agricultural endeavor, and I suddenly realized that it must have been like this on other mornings through all time. At

the beginning of recorded history man was doing just this; he must have done it before we had the printed word, and would still be doing it with every recurring daybreak for many years to come. It was at this very moment I caught the full thought that history has indeed been continuous and is by no means at an end or dependent for its life on printed books. In short—and the sense of it was so vivid as to startle—history lay all about me at this moment; history as genuine as had been the petty-state feuds that destroyed the glory of ancient Greece. Moreover, this was history in which I had an actual part. Not before, I am sure, had I ever divined my living contact with this raw material—for raw material it was, to be sure; I did not forget that history, to become strictly such, must first be written by those equipped for the task.

At last, over some ridge behind us, the sun shot its first rays; our way was no longer shadowless. And about this time, as on the other morning, we approached a town set fair among trees already greening. My companion, long silent while I meditated, now addressed me. "How about some breakfast, Chief?"

"I, for one," I cried, "am heartily in favor of it."

"The motion is carried," he replied with a droll assumption of the parliamentary manner, and after skirting the edge of the town he brought our vehicle to a halt in one of its lesser streets, before a door of what a sign announced as The Good Eats Paris Café. It was not, I saw at a glance, a place I would have chosen, being frankly a resort where one must sit on a lofty stool before a counter to eat one's food. Our breakfast, however, was not half bad, and I consumed mine

with a keen relish in spite of my sinister surroundings and the near presence of many roughly dressed denizens of the underworld.

One of these rather disconcerted me at our entrance by patting his open lips the while he emitted a shrill yelling, but my companion looked at him in a manner cold with hostility and demanded, "What's the idea, Bill?" So truculent did he seem that the offender at once fell silent, nor did my guise of an aboriginal excite further notice.

Once more in the car my companion counseled me as to my behavior under similar circumstances. "You're likely to meet these village cut-ups [blackguards] any time," he said, "so remember you don't speak English. Even one sentence of that fancy line of yours would spill the bean [reveal that I was not a true aboriginal]. If any of these yaps [hicks] tries to get funny, just give him a dirty look and clam up. Of course if they mean all right and want to pass the time of day you can act polite and say 'How!' and shake hands in a dignified manner. But that's all you say, just 'How' or maybe 'How, How!'—twice like that—say it deep down in your bosom."

I thanked Mr. Jackson for this hint and achieved the salutation with a grunting effect that quite delighted him. "Some Indian!" he declared, although this would be one of his exaggerations, as he well knew I had not a drop of Indian blood in my veins.

The day proved perfect and our ride over the gently hilled farmlands became most enjoyable to my still fresh spirit of adventure. Again and again I would remind myself that I had not to return any place on

time, nor fear to meet rebuke for being late at whatever place we might presently arrive. It seemed to me that with this ideal companion I should like to continue on even into the Hudson Bay country, as of old that company of gentlemen adventurers had done, and I suggested as much to Mr. Jackson.

He replied that the picking up there couldn't be so very good, and that for his part he preferred a country with not more than twenty miles between towns that would skin pretty. A little patience on my part and I had his meaning. We were yet in the state of Illinois, where the picking [opportunity for gain] was fair; in fact, we had passed several promising towns and hamlets only because it was deemed wiser to put more miles between us and my old man of the sea, as I now chaffingly called Bertrand Meigs. "But I reckon we can pull a show by tonight," went on Mr. Jackson. "And by tomorrow we'll be safe in the grand old state of Iowa, which skins pretty [repays endeavor] three hundred and sixty-five days in the year and in leap year one day more. In fact, give me Iowa, where the boobs [yaps or hicks] simply come up and ask to be had [beg to be dealt with] and I wouldn't crave another state out of our whole glorious union. A guy [bird or man] with any savvy [acumen] needn't ever step across its border. They tell me that in some places out on the edge they still buy lightning-rods, and almost everyone you meet will be wearing the Little Wonder Electric Tibetan rheumatism ring. I know because I sold them."

Asked when we should come in view of the Rocky Mountains, Mr. Jackson became grave and said we

might be delayed by his numerous engagements in the agrarian districts. He had obligated himself before learning of my wish, and he would prefer to keep me waiting rather than disappoint people who had learned that his word was as good as his bond. This decision I of course applauded. As Mr. Jackson now reminded me, the mountains had always been there and always would be; it was not as if they were going to be torn down next week—a bit of his drollery—while a man's good repute might be tarnished by one broken engagement.

At midday we stopped for luncheon at a place similar to that where we had breakfasted, though its name was different, being The Bon Ton Waffle Kitchen, and here, in addition to what we ate, my companion purchased a stock of sandwiches and some bottles of milk for our evening meal. My rôle as a red man attracted no attention and we were soon on the road again, continuing until three o'clock, when Mr. Jackson fell asleep at the wheel and was close to wrecking us.

"It's time to rest up anyway," he remarked when he had the car again in the road, "and I know the place." A few miles beyond he turned into a lane that cut a forest, and we presently halted on the green bank of a brook. Mr. Jackson now brought our blankets and pillows from the tonneau and we reclined on the sward, being both in need of repose. The brook made a friendly whispering and I presently slept.

My slumber must have been protracted, for when I awoke the shadows lay long to the east across our charmingly treed nook. Mr. Jackson was already up, and I saw that he busied himself with our belongings.

The suitcases and many other bits of gear were out on the ground and, as I watched, a strip of canvas was stretched above the stuff and attached to trees in such a manner that it would form, I was told, our night's shelter. Beneath this I now brought the blankets and pillows upon which we had reclined, while my companion replaced in the car certain chests that would be presently needed.

By the time dusk had obscured our surroundings we had eaten our simple meal and I was arrayed in my war bonnet and suit of fringed buckskin, also in a blanket of gaudy pattern which I was directed to keep wrapped close about my form except when making my address or performing the sacred medicine dance of the Ugwalallas. My companion meantime applied an unguent to his long hair so that it became lustrous, and exchanged his jacket for a black frock coat which brought him a new dignity. When he had satisfied himself by a final survey that all was in readiness he addressed me genially.

"Chief, you are now about to make your professional début. Into the drab lives of peasants inhabiting yonder hamlet I trust you will bring a note of romance, giving them golden memories of a stalwart savage to treasure along with the priceless boon I also hope to confer upon such of them as have in their pants the merely nominal price for same. Are you ready?"

At once I fell into his half-chaffing mood. "Let it go, Professor," I gayly cried, and folding my arms across my chest under the closely drawn blanket of gay colors I exclaimed, "Ugh, ugh! Me heap big chief!" achieving an excellent ventral tone.

"Goody, goody!" Mr. Jackson applauded. "I will say that you are the goods [the gazukus]. Now here's your pipe all loaded. Light it and smoke in a dignified and aloof manner after I start my spiel." So saying he threw back his head to shake his ringlets into order and carefully fixed his splendid hat in place. Then, buttoning the impressive frock coat, he directed me to enter the tonneau while he took the wheel and backed our equipage out to the road.

The hamlet he had spoken of lay perhaps a mile beyond our rest camp and we presently entered its one street of small shops before which many of the resident yaps lounged restfully after, I presume, their day's toil in the fields where they would have been plowing the glebe or sowing the seed of their cereal foods. We instantly attracted the notice of several of these groups. Before one of them Mr. Jackson halted his car, beckoning to him a member of it, a listless, ill-dressed person with spreading mustaches who wore a polished star upon the lapel of his bum coat.

"Good evening, officer." Thus Mr. Jackson greeted this person with a courtly lifting of his magnificent hat, at the same time extending his hand, which the other grasped. Unless my eyes tricked me the palm of Mr. Jackson contained a bank note which the other retained when their hands fell apart. "I am about to endeavor to entertain the good people of your thriving little city with song and comical anecdote," continued Mr. Jackson, "and I trust, officer, that this is not only agreeable to you but that you can find time to be present and see that law and order are maintained."

I now observed the person addressed steal a down-

ward glance at the bill remaining in his hand. At once he replied, "Go as far as you like, Doc." Again Mr. Jackson raised his hat with a punctilious "Thank you, officer," and drove our car to the head of the street, where we stopped in a small open area near a drinking fountain, and he arranged certain auxiliary lights carried by the car, directing one upon himself and the other full upon me. As I moved aside from its blinding rays he muttered, "Keep in the spot, Chief; that's what you're here for; and light up the pipe."

While I did this he took from its case the banjo, and, after bending his ear solicitously above it, struck a series of brisk tinkling chords. Immediately the lounging groups before the shops began to stream toward us. From side streets to our left and right came other yaps or hicks. A crowd was close packed about our car before Mr. Jackson had finished his first song, a rollicking and noisy ballad in the negro dialect in which the vocalist was required to laugh heartily midway of the chorus.

The song finished, Mr. Jackson surveyed the increasing throng and, after cordially urging them to draw near so as to make way for newcomers, he took from a chest beside him a pair of small human effigies or marionettes. Clutching one in either hand he said, "Now, friends, I shall endeavor to entertain you with my celebrated feats of ventriloquism, or the art of throwing the human voice. I have given this exhibition"—the speaker seemed to fondle his syllables with a drawn-out relish, saying "thees ex-he-bee-shon," for example—"before the most critical aud-ee-on-ces in this country and in Europe and on each and ev-a-ree occasion I

have baffled the world's foremost scientists to explain how I done it. And let me tell you——"

Here, to my stupefaction, the speaker appeared to be interrupted by one of his figures, which exclaimed in the most lifelike manner, "Doctor, doctor—don't I get no chance here?"

I saw through the trick at once, clever though it was. I had never witnessed a demonstration of this difficult art, but had once read a description of it and could not be deceived. Frowning at the interrupter, the real speaker said in a tone of severe rebuke, "Come, come, Sambo, be silent, sir!"

Then resuming his explanation to the audience, he was again annoyed, this time by the other figure, who spoke in an Irish dialect, saying, "Wurra, wurra! Cut it out, Doc. Give me and the smoke a chance, won't you?"

Hereupon the speaker seemed to relent, saying in his own voice, "Very well, Pat, have it your own way."

At once the figure of the negro spoke up, saying, "Good evening, Pat."

"Good morning, Sambo," replied his fellow.

"But why do you say morning?" demanded the black fellow.

"Faith, and didn't I just wake up in that box?" retorted the other with a true Irish wit, at which many of the crowd laughed heartily.

Now followed an exchange of repartee, somewhat brutal at moments, in which the Irish figure invariably scored off his opponent. And there was a conundrum, I remember, the Irish figure asking the African, "Noah was a great believer in a fruit diet, was he not?"

"Why do you think so, Pat?" countered the other.

Crisply came the reply, "Sure, and did he not stock the ark with preserved pears [pairs]?"

Great merriment was aroused by this, and I myself was so overcome that I joined in it and was laughing heartily when Mr. Jackson leaned over the back of his seat, pretending to search for something, and in low, gruff tones said, "Don't laugh, you poor fish [guy, bird, bozo]. You don't understand a word of this. Get dignified again." Instantly I realized the justice of his rebuke. My laughter would spill many of the beans, and I instantly recovered my look and manner of aloofness.

The exhibition of voice-throwing concluded with Sambo repeating the song Mr. Jackson had already sung, and very well the darky seemed to do it, though first there was a laughable scene created by the Irish Patrick, who objected to the song, and when his insulting interruptions proved unavailing declared that he would not listen. "By jabbers, if that negro is going to sing you must put me back in the box," he said in comical dismay, and this was done before the song was had.

With Sambo also restored to the box, Mr. Jackson became serious and delivered his affecting tale about the panacea he was prepared to offer them. Dramatically he told how he had saved the life of the famous war chieftain of the Ugwalallas, who in gratitude had imparted to him the secret compound of life-giving natural herbs which would so wondrously relieve human suffering.

Then motioning me to stand up and throw off my

blanket he continued, "And now, friends, I call your attention to that noble red man who has secured permission from the Great White Father at Washington, D. C., to accompany me on my visits among you. Regard him closely. By means of this wonderful potion which I am putting within the reach of one and all at a purely nominal price he has retained his vigor to the advanced age of one hundred and eleven years, as proved by his tribal records which any doubter is free to consult in the archives of our national capital. By his daily use of the famed Aga-Jac Bitters, Nature's own remedy, he has retained the strength of his native pines, and while yet but of middle age he had the distinguished honor of shaking hands with our martyred President, Abraham Lincoln. Now, good people, I shall try to prevail upon this noble specimen of manhood to address a few words to you in his native tongue, as he speaks no other. In his own simple way he will tell you how the Great Spirit guided him to the life-giving herbs. I am a rough man, friends, and perhaps I have forgotten the prayer I learned at my mother's knee; perhaps in this modern time of scientific disbelief I have lost a bit of my childhood's faith; yet I am not ashamed to say to one and all of you that when this simple-minded savage tells how the Great Spirit guided him to this marvelous discovery I put away all my skepticism and believe as he believes—as you, good people, would have to believe could you understand his eloquent words."

At this the speaker turned deferentially to me and uttered the strange sounds we had agreed upon, to which I replied in the rehearsed syllables.

"The old chief consents," announced Mr. Jackson, turning again to the crowd; and then, impressively, "Lay-dees and gen-tel-men, Chief Ugwalalla!"

After which he sat down and I recited the Vedic hymn which had so delighted my companion. I think I am justified in saying I did this dramatically and with telling effect. I knew I held my audience as well as I know when a history class is attentive. When I in turn sat down, amid a respectful silence, Mr. Jackson rose.

"And now, friends, in offering you my small remaining stock of the famed Aga-Jac Bitters at the merely nominal price of a dollar a bottle—and where on God's green footstool could you obtain such value for ten-fold that contemptible sum?—I wish to announce that, not content with this, I shall also present to each and every patron a gift that is alone worth five times the entire sum. I am enabled to make this superb offer by reason of the fact that I am merely an agent of the manufacturers who wish to introduce it to a select few in order to create a public demand. I refer, friends, to the world-famous European sensation which is already throwing the ladies of our land into frenzies of delight—none other than the exquisite perfume known the world over as Sheik-Lure, which will transform milady's boudoir into a vale of rarest blossoms and render her own fair self irresistible to those she may wish to attract. Remember, friends, with every bottle of the famous Aga-Jac I present free gratis and without price a full two-ounce flask of Sheik-Lure——Thank you. Thank you, sir——"

For before he had fairly concluded his stirring

message, the speaker was busy handing out bottles of the famed bitters together with minute vials of the equally famed perfume, receiving in exchange silver dollars which he tossed carelessly into a box on the seat beside him. But even while thus engaged, his hands moving with lightning rapidity, he did not fail to keep up a running fire of comment.

"Have your change ready, gentlemen. Give those back of you a chance to purchase the world's little wonder potion. Here you are, sir, thank you; and you, madam, though I perceive you have no need of Sheik-Lure to enhance your charms. Thank you—and you—here you are, sir. One moment, don't forget your change——" And so on, while the silver coins clinked incessantly in his cash box.

When, after a period of this busy commerce the buying seemed to slacken and those on the outskirts of the crowd betrayed a tendency to stroll off, Mr. Jackson again took up his banjo and sang a ballad which stayed them, a descriptive ballad of a frightful holocaust in which many lives had been lost. It began:

In this world of care and trouble
 Many accidents have occurred.
 I will sing to you about one
 No doubt you all have heard.
 It was in Fall River City
 That people were burned and killed,
 In a prison manufactory
 Known as the Granite Mill.

The simple pathos of the thing held his auditors to the end, the singer becoming finely dramatic in his rendition of the more striking stanzas, as where,

They were sliding down a rope
 But when they got halfway down
 The burning strands they broke.
 Crash. crash, they fell upon the ground.

And more than one auditor, I could see, was deeply affected when he touchingly painted another scene where a fair young girl stood at a window and called upon her mother to save her "as she fell back into the flame." The conclusion, I thought, seemed ill-advised, running as it did:

There is one more thing that I will say
 And say it with a will:
 Try to escape if a fire breaks out
 In another granite mill.

Yet the audience applauded heartily, seeming not to resent the advice that they try to escape from any burning prison in which they might be confined.

Concluding his song, Mr. Jackson again urged the famous Indian panacea upon the throng, and now, when a lady purchased, he had a way of handing her two vials of the rare perfume, saying cordially, "This is for you, madam; not that you require it, but I am anxious to dispose of these few remaining flasks and so discharge my agreement with the manufacturers. All I ask is that you frankly tell your friends about this rare essence which within thirty days from now will be selling in your city for five dollars the flask."

This stimulated the crowd to new buying. When a slack time again ensued the speaker announced, "Friends, as an especial treat to you I am about to request our venerable red brother here to perform for

you the sacred medicine dance of his tribe," and turning to me he repeated the mystic phrases he had before used.

I was not displeased at this interlude, because the night air had become chill. I threw back my blanket, descended from the car, grasping a rattle fashioned from a turtle shell inclosing pebbles, and did the dance I had rehearsed, keeping chiefly in mind that I stood on a heated stove top and must lift my feet rapidly. Also I chanted the guttural accompaniment agreed upon.

When I had finished and was again in the car Mr. Jackson said, "There, people, you see this old man, one hundred and eleven years of age, dancing with the vigor of youth, and all because of the world's little wonder potion of which I have only a few bottles remaining. Who will be the lucky purchasers? Don't crowd, please! Have your change ready!" Thus a few more sales were made, after which Mr. Jackson bade them a good night and we were presently speeding back to our rest camp. Alighting there my companion grasped and warmly wrung my hand.

"Chief," said he earnestly, "I have to hand it to you [feel compelled to compliment you]. You are certainly the goods [the real gazukus], the best Indian in the state of Iowa. You even had me going [impressed]. Stick by the show and watch the jack [kale] being pushed at us."

I was indeed pleased by this tribute, nor did I neglect to tell the man how impressed I had been with his own display of talent, especially in the science of ventriloquism, or voice-throwing.

"I don't exactly hate myself in that line of work," he ingenuously confessed. Meantime he had kindled a small fire and placed on it a coffee pot from one of his chests. While this was heating he counted his money "Forty-two iron men [dollars]," he cried at last; "only thirty-two of which are profit, however, because those bottles cost money. Therefore, old bean [chieftain or sachem], you are sixteen plunks [kales] to the mustard. Not so bad for a start, eh?"

"I, for one, consider it excellent," I said; and indeed, reckoning time and energy invested, it was so far in excess of my ordinary stipend that I felt my previous years had been frittered away.

CHAPTER VIII

ALTHOUGH sixteen jacks to the better, I reminded myself, after we had gone to rest beneath our rude shelter, that this income could hardly continue, because our stock of the bitters and the costly perfume had been depleted on our first evening. What was my delight then, the next morning, while assisting to pack our belongings, to observe that I had been mistaken. We were still amply stocked with the world's little wonder potion and with the vials of rare essence. Indeed, the bulk of our heavy load was composed of these precious stuffs.

Breakfast over, which my companion skilfully prepared at his small fire, we were early on our way, and I took the first opportunity of mentioning this threatened shortage, only to learn that it had been a point in the selling talk, as it is termed. I saw it to be based on a sound psychology, and said as much.

"Trust old Sooner," returned my companion. "Nature's own remedy par excellence will not fail us. I have three thousand labels, the bottles can be had along the way, and there is always the river." I took him to mean that the potent medical herbs could be found in any wooded glade, and should the manufacturers of the perfume wish him to distribute more of their rare product before raising its price they could ship him additional lots.

We were now speeding over an excellent road and Sooner—as I now familiarly called this sterling fellow—referred again to his forethought in providing supplies. “I never got short of stock yet,” he explained. “If one thing gives out there’s always another. And furthermore, that day I found you was the first time in twenty years I been caught without a get-away stake [means for removing from one place to another]. Only once they had me skinned [impoverished]; that was when I got into Frisco after my first big killing [financial coup] with Noweka the champion snake eater. I’d been playing the sticks, [an athletic game] a whole season and couldn’t wait till I got across the bay to begin peeling the roll. I reckon I was the only man at that time ever opened wine on a ferry-boat. The trip was only half an hour, but I got enough grape-fuss flowing to meet some pleasant pals that took a keen interest in me and my roll and the busy little rock that sparkled on my chest, and, goody, goody, these stanch comrades knew where an easy stud game was going. I walked right in and walked right out again the next morning—from chicken to feathers in nine swift hours. But I ain’t been nicked [injured] yet any more.”

I doubt even now if I got all the values of this catastrophe, several of the phrases puzzling me in spite of my swiftly increasing knowledge of the vernacular. I gathered, however, that Sooner had been taught a good lesson by some sharpers who fleeced him, and had since become a smart egg [wise bird], though presently he caused me a new confusion by remarking, “Yes, sir, once bit, twice shy! The scar of that first vaccination is still on my carcass as fresh as the day I got it.”

I saw that I must have misconstrued his first speech, which, though plainly worded, had been curiously tricky and elusive, and contented myself with remarking that vaccination, in spite of the fanatics who denounce it, is an excellent precautionary measure.

"Yea, bo! [yes, sir]," agreed Sooner warmly, and fell silent as we sped over the fruitful landscape.

Early that afternoon we reached a considerable city where we halted for our midday repast and to replenish the stock of provisions for our gipsy encampment, and shortly thereafter crossed a lofty bridge, spanning a stream of great width which Sooner told me was the River Mississippi. I surveyed with interest the mighty Father of Waters, which flows through this productive scene, and learned that beyond its farther bank lay Iowa, traditionally hospitable to such as we. The rolling land devoted to agricultural pursuits still continued and we passed prosperous-appearing farmsteads and many attractive hamlets where we would have lingered but that we still felt some fear of pursuit. "Fat picking!" Sooner would murmur as we hurried on, meaning that the land was fertile.

Readjusting my wig I felt a new exultation. Many miles already from the stuffy confines of Fairwater, I still forged west to where the Rocky Mountains would presently burst on my view in all their mighty grandeur. I felt, indeed, as a true red aboriginal must have felt in the days gone by as he fearlessly urged his horses and oxen out to the trackless plain and on toward the westering sun. For me, as for him, a new world beckoned to thrilling perils and happy escapes.

As on the day before, we sought a camping place by

the way, this time entering an open gate and following a faintly worn road across a field to where a growth of willows indicated a stream. On a grassy sward beneath these we were setting up our simple ménage when we were approached by the owner of the land, an elderly, dour-looking person in the costume of an agriculturist, who stoutly demanded a compensation. Sooner showed himself at once the fellow's superior in courtesy, and presently drew him to a confidential chat at the rear of the car, where our stock of the world's wonder potion was carried. Faintly I could hear him there extolling the merits of our remedy, and after a bit the fellow withdrew, bidding us both good day with a marked amenity, in striking contrast to the gruffness of his original accost. Sooner resumed his tasks, humming lightly, pausing only to gaze off to where our landlord climbed a distant fence, and demand of me, "Did I say they were good or did I say they were bad?"

"You said they would skin pretty," I replied, easily recalling his metaphor.

"Well," he continued, "this one is probably the hardest-boiled [least sentimental] gink [guy or person] in the whole state. First he had the nerve to ask one buck [a kale] for his camp privilege. And after I done my song-and-dance [apple-sauce] about the bitters and offered him a bottle at half price he turned me down cold [refused in a determined manner]. No, sir, he wasn't easy. He wouldn't consider nothing less than two bottles at half price. So I had to give in, and here's his dollar"—flicking this in the air and catching it cleverly again. "A heart like flint, that old train robber. I told him so. I told him that kind hearts were more

than cornets or even saxophones. But he wouldn't melt. He had us at his mercy and knew it. I hope his mortgage falls due this very week."

It seemed to me, however, that we had done very well with the rustic, because I understood that the little wonder potion could be advantageously sold even at fifty cents a flask. But my friend continued to mutter at intervals that he had been held up by a bandit.

Having consumed our evening meal I donned my Indian habiliments, looking forward with real zest to the dignified rôle I was to play. Sooner having meantime arranged his stock, his banjo and the chest holding his marionettes in the front compartment, we set gaily off. This time our hamlet was a treeless town with straggling wooden edges that reached into the abutting fields, yet here, as on the previous night, we were accorded an enthusiastic reception after Sooner had found and shaken hands with the police officer. And this time I schooled myself to betray no amusement at the laughable speech and antics of the marionettes. I sat withdrawn in dignity during their excruciating performance, an object of profound interest, I was not disagreeably aware, to many of the crowd packed about our vehicle.

The sale of our staple proceeded in a most gratifying manner, each flask being accompanied by a gratuity of the perfume which my friend had been employed to introduce.

While awaiting my turn it occurred to me that I might try another language this evening to see if I could not increase the gruff sonority which had so pleased Sooner. Therefore, when I had been introduced, I

arose, allowed my blanket to fall from my shoulders and, with all the manner I could summon, launched into a familiar bit of Cæsar. Hardly had I achieved three lines of this when I was disconcerted by a burst of the coarsest laughter and saw that the offender was an overgrown youth of unpleasant aspect who stood near my rostrum.

Too late I divined that my speech must have been intelligible to him—some lout of a high-school pupil who should at that moment have been conning his own Latin at home. Only for a moment was I embarrassed, however, and with a renewed fervor dashed into the Vedic hymn which had already served me so well, noting, as I did so, that the rowdy's face settled at once into lines of baffled incomprehension. Having finished amid a respectful silence, I sat down, relieved that my wits had been about me. I saw that I must not venture to submit the prose of Cæsar—probably not even Greek—as the tongue of the American aboriginal.

When the time for my dance came I was again grateful for the chance to exercise in the night chill, and entered into the movements with a right good will, grunting ventrally in time with the measure beaten by Sooner on the resonant head of his banjo. When I had finished, a gink or bird in the forefront of the crowd that had circled about my dancing place extended his hand, saying "Hello, old top" [chief].

Seeing that a courtesy was meant I accepted his hand, exclaiming gruffly, "Why, why!" as Sooner had instructed me.

"But why not?" responded the fellow.

Not knowing what reply to make I remembered my

other speech. Drawing myself up with dignity I responded, "Ugh, ugh! I am a heap big chieftain!"

At this I was again offended by that same coarse burst of laughter and the same loutish bird—as he stood to one side I had not observed him—now rudely cried, "Like h——l you are! All Gaul is divided into three parts, is it? Well, you have at least two of them."

There followed exclamations of delight and shouts of merriment from the bozos standing about, so, after repeating in a tone of rebuke my simple announcement, I stalked to the door of our car and entered it with, I am sure, a real dignity. My friend Sooner, having observed the contretemps, though he did not comprehend it, seized his instrument and with admirable presence of mind burst into a noisy and ribald ballad of amour among the lower classes which at any other time I should have thought in wretched taste but which, I was now glad to note, diverted attention from me. Meantime, the bumpkin who had exercised his impudent wit upon me, accompanied by the hick who had shaken my hand, left the crowd and walked to the farther side of the street, where they stood regarding me with what seemed a gleeful malice.

Our session was soon at an end, and glad I was to be free of this disquieting scrutiny. As Sooner, having disposed of all the wonder potion that seemed to be needed here, was rearranging his boxes preparatory to our departure, I glanced up again at the lout and his fellow, and my consternation may be imagined when I say that with them now stood none other than the detective, Bertrand Meigs, his foolish face clearly de-

fined by one of our lights. He was still wrapped in the ulster as I had last seen him. As I stared in an attitude that had stiffened, the bouncer pulled from his ulster pocket the rattan stick to which was attached the Fair-water pennant, and waved this at me, dancing meantime with every symptom of lunacy.

Sooner had not observed the fellow and I resolved not to tell him, until we were beyond the village, that we had been trailed. As we left the lighted street, and I would have spoken, he began hurriedly to question me about the indignity I had suffered in the crowd. I explained that I had incautiously tried a bit of Latin that was understood, and also repeated my speech to the hick who shook my hand, whereupon my friend exclaimed:

"Well, you old bonehead [one of strong character]! Didn't I tell you to say 'How, how'? What did you want to go and say 'Why, why,' for? And never say 'I am a big chieftain.' You might as well say you are a big cheese, for all it would fool anyone. You certainly pulled a bloomer [faux pas] there, Chief."

Somewhat vexed, I retorted that the mistake of "why" for "how" was a trifle that might have befallen anyone. I admitted my error, however, in venturing Latin, and promised not to repeat it. Having disposed of this matter and, seeing that my friend was again in good humor, I said, "I will wager you can't guess who stood on the curb as we left that hick town."

My friend meditated significantly before he replied. "Since you put it in that arch tone of voice I'll wager you that I can guess—our detective friend."

"Right you are!" I cried, and I related the circumstance of my observing that he had joined the young rowdy who understood Latin.

"Wouldn't that have your goat!" retorted my friend in deep disgust. "Say, that cunning little rascal has got a smelldog beat a million. Now, I suppose, we have to take another run-out powder. Well, of all the——" Here his language became coarse in the extreme and I should have preferred not to hear it except that my friend revealed so intriguing a fertility in epithet.

Back at our rest camp I supposed that we would take our running-out drug at once, and I believe this to have been Sooner's plan, but after he had made a pot of coffee, which we drank in moody silence, he suddenly declared that we would remain. "It's no use talking," he went on, "that bird must be all curdled in his cupola [mentally weak]. If he's out to make a pinch, why don't he? Why loaf up and wave his silly flag like a chucklehead [dolt]? If this wasn't kind-to-animals week I'd go back there and peel his rind off [injure him]. But listen, Chief, I got a better way. Maybe this old bean ain't running sweet! I won't tell you now, but you can go to sleep and feel safe. Once more tomorrow night this skeesicks can wave his little flag, but never again—or else I got rats on my rafters [power of deductive reasoning seriously impaired]. It's foolish for a couple of grown men with a life work to let a nitwit like that dutch up the best route in Iowa, the sportsman's paradise. Just keep your eyes open tomorrow night, and don't scream nor anything when you see how I lighted the fuse under the old mill. This lad is going to have the time-tables

turned on him, that's all." Sooner seemed well pleased with himself as he concluded his speech, and I was obliged to be content with it, for he refused me any details of his plan, and we retired to our blankets.

After a sound night's rest we were up early and once more crisping over the highway, my friend still rather fatuously, I thought, beaming self-approval for the ingenuity of his plan to discomfit the unspeakable Meigs. Rather to my surprise he did not hasten through our village of the night before, but stopped at several shops along its one street, making various purchases in a leisurely manner, and telling those who greeted him, as well as the shop people, that we should that night give our entertainment in the town of Cray's Point, some fifty miles distant. Also he inquired of several street loungers the best road to this place. When we had gone on I shrewdly reminded him that our pursuer would doubtless, because of his loquacity, trace us to our next stopping place without difficulty.

"Now wasn't that careless of me?" he replied. "I sure forgot myself, what with one thing and another. Do you really think he'll hear from these people what our town is?"

"It will be most natural for him to inquire," I retorted, and then, recalling his sharp manner with me the night before, I added, "You surely handled a bloomer there, my friend."

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "That's right, give me the raspberry [ridicule me without mercy]. I deserve it for once. But maybe he'll forget the name of the town, even if they do tell him."

"He will probably write it down," I said, but forbore to chaff the good fellow any more, and our day was pleasantly spent, chiefly in my telling him something of the history of this world in which he lived, he being frightfully ignorant of facts known to every intelligent schoolboy. He seemed grateful for my efforts to enlighten him, but declared at last that even if he could run through history nigger-wild [unerringly] it wouldn't keep the hot meat behind his gums, and he would be wise to persist in his present line of endeavor.

Reaching the neighborhood of our town at an early hour, we passed a long, restful afternoon in a parklike vale where we had our evening meal and where I changed to my costume. We were not to camp overnight, it seemed, but to go on immediately our performance was over. This seemed to be a part of my companion's great plan over which, at frequent intervals during the day, he had chuckled in apt but uncommunicating delight.

When all was ready we drove into the town; Sooner followed his now familiar course of looking for the police officer, whom he presently found in a relaxed attitude before the doorway of a resort named the Pastime Pool Parlor. Instead of shaking hands with this person from the car as was his wont, however, Sooner left his seat to engage him in a closely confidential chat some distance off. The officer was a large man with a roughish yellow beard; I noticed that his heavy hands were also profusely haired. My companion seemed to be explaining to him something to which, I could see, he listened from the first with deep

attention, and he presently began to cast sharp glances up and down the street.

I then perceived Sooner's plan, which I at once acknowledged to be ingenious: He would have requested this officer to warn our familiar nuisance that he must cease annoying us under pain of suffering arrest and perhaps incarceration in the town's prison. I doubted, it is true, if the mere waving of a college pennant at us would constitute so grave an offense, but as to this I was sure that Sooner's knowledge of the underworld exceeded my own.

Before I could inform my friend that I had probed his design our car was in place at the head of the street and the first twinkling chords of our banjo were charming an eager throng to our side. I noticed, however, that the police officer had followed us to our station and was now standing within an adjacent doorway, watchfully scanning the faces of those who gathered.

Our performance smoothly ran its course, the sale of our stocks was gratifying. And my own work received its due of respectful admiration, for not again did I commit the error of reciting too-common Latin or fail to emit a guttural "How!" when a villager greeted me. Although the officer had kept stolidly at his post our detective had not appeared. I began to believe that he might indeed have forgotten the name of the town, even if he possessed the wit to inquire it. But then, as almost the last bottle of the famed Aga-Jac was being exchanged for a silver dollar, I saw Sooner erect himself from his courtly selling attitude, stiffen rigidly as he stared ahead, then raise his hat in an apparently meaning gesture.

The officer, as if reading a signal, stepped from the shelter of his doorway, and at the same instant Bertrand Meigs, who had entered from a side street, paused directly before him. I saw his foolish face contort in its grin. I could even see the pocketed hand, clutching the stick, start to emerge. But the pennant this time was not displayed, for the officer had gripped the arms of the offender from behind. There was a very slight scuffle, some words of shrill protest from our weak-minded pursuer above a growling of threats from the burly captor, and at once the two were surrounded by our own crowd.

For a moment I could see nothing of the captive. Then at the stern command of the officer a way opened through the throng and I saw Bertrand Meigs, his hands manacled behind him, led off in the clutch of one of those large bearded hands that grasped his collar.

Yet even as he went in this ignominy the fellow's mania was unquelled. His eyes were on me, who had stood up the better to observe him, and as he passed he shouted passionately, "For the honor of old Fairwater!" I concluded then that his malady must be incurable.

Sooner Jackson turned as the prisoner was borne away, followed by our late audience and patrons.

"That, ladies and gentlemen," said he blandly to me, "concludes my part of the evening's entertainment. I thank you!"

CHAPTER IX

ONCE again we flitted while the world about us slept away the hours of darkness. We must make hay while the sun shone, said Sooner. "I handed your little playmate a knockout [a surprise] back there, but I won't be keeled over to see him waving his do-funny at our next stand. Talk about a leech—when a leech gives up, that quince [sap] is just taking hold."

"He is undeniably persistent," I agreed.

"Nobody better deny it in front of me," retorted my companion grimly. "You'd think he couldn't make anything but a lemonade out of what I slipped him back there, but you can't tell. He's the only one of his kind. I bet when they fleshed that lad they threw the mold away. I wouldn't give as good as track odds, even now, that he won't drive us out of the world's ideal hunting ground where game is so thick it ain't hardly a sporting proposition."

"It was a good raspberry you inflicted upon him, at any rate," I rejoined, "or was it a quince you spoke of?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed my companion loudly. "That is not really for me to say, but I told the umbrageous Sherlock Holmes [a famous police officer] that his man was Chicago Slim, wanted for holding up a mail car out of Milwaukee last week and gunning the express messenger."

"But they will soon find out he isn't," I suggested.

"Sure, but they'll take their time doing it. They are going to be very, very careful, because I also said that a reward of five thousand dollars is offered for this crook. If you think they'll turn him loose in the morning after a good talking-to, you are grievously in error, my dear Watson. With so large a sum as five grand at stake the rural constabulary are painstaking; they will never act too hastily in releasing this desperado. For at least a week his friends may find him in that same little coop should they wish to pass gifts of fruit and sweetmeats through the bars. Meantime we will have once more left a blind trail. Of course the poor fish [demented person] ought to be in some good booby-hatch [hoosegow] where the nut-sharps [alienists] could watch him, but that would take time. One can't always be choosers."

I was delighted, indeed, to learn that we should have a week in which to lose ourselves in the wilds of this hunter's paradise, and though I saw that my friend was still low in mind I felt that we should at last be unmolested in our gainful pursuit.

The night wore on as we put the miles behind us, and again I romantically watched the sleeping world awaken to its age-old tasks in relation to tillage. Again, too, I rejoiced that I was no longer a thrall. My friend and I were a couple of care-free hedonists, junketing across a world where the game abounded.

That afternoon we lay by for a few hours of refreshing slumber, then continued in another night-long progress, Sooner believing it unwise to stage a rabbit drive, as he now pithily described our evening labors,

so close to our incarcerated annoyer. The next day, however, having achieved a considerable distance, he declared the good-hunting signs to be irresistible, and our evening was given over to the relief of human suffering in a thriving village whose good people proved most agreeably responsive.

And though we both became apprehensive as our little play neared its end, there was no sign of the leech. Plainly, as Sooner remarked, we had outsmarted the fellow, and not any longer need we pass, out of prudence, so many towns where the hunting was unrivaled. Nor, any longer, need we drive sleepless through the black night. When on the following evening we completed our work with no disgraceful interruption, Sooner became more buoyant than I had yet seen him, and declared that our future was unclouded.

"We hold Iowa in the hollow of our hand," he declared. "While grass grows and water runs we shall be busy adding to our collection of noble heads to be mounted in the trophy room at Rinktum Castle." Thus would he often sport with the metaphors of big-game hunting. "Furthermore, old comrade, I am a bit tired of sleeping out on the pampas or staked plains at the mercy of prowling dingbats and the venomous tree-climbing gumdoodle whose bite is fatal to man and often to his self. And I crave boughten victuals instead of a delicious home-cooked meal consisting of two bananas and a bottle of milk. Tomorrow night we shall be pampered by slaves in a certain palatial hotel de luxury I know of that has real beds and hot biscuits and oftentimes preserves. Come, what say you, good Señor Ashtabulaohio?"

"I, for one," I cried, entering into his spirit of gay badinage that yet masked genuine emotion, "shall not object to mingling with the ginks and yaps once more if we can discover a suitable boozing ken or hoosegow."

"Goody!" exclaimed my friend. "And don't let me forget to have your tapestry trimmed—I mean the edelweiss," he added, seeing me nonplused, and pointing the words with a gesture to indicate that he meant my growing beard. "I'd shave you again myself, but the sight of blood often maddens me beyond control. Two days more of this fine growing weather and you could play Uncle Tom without a make-up."

Hereupon, in one of his baffling moods, he began to bay in deep tones after the manner of an angry dog, breaking suddenly from this to exclaim in the high, distressed voice of a woman, "Merciful Heaven! The river is choked with ice!" Such was his way at these times, and I had long given up trying to fathom his meanings or follow the tortuous windings of his agile mind, though I could divine that his intention was far from serious.

On the morrow, as promised, we reached our next town at midday, where we found an excellent inn, the Continental Hotel, a faded structure on the main street, of but slight architectural significance. Our rooms seemed sumptuous, however, after so many nights in the open, and such was the cajoling manner of my friend with the girl who served our meals that we were regaled with the inn's best.

She, indeed, could hardly do enough for us. She was rather a well-favored young woman of queenly bearing, profusely jeweled and with abundant hair of

the purest gold, and she had at first assumed with my friend hauteur quite repellent. His courtly manner, however, and his manifest admiration for her beauty of person soon won her approval, and she brought us several delicacies, at my companion's suggestion, not offered to the bums about us. At the conclusion of the meal he rewarded her with several vials of the costly perfume we carried and caused her to laugh heartily by saying that I was the original Uncle Tom who had been hiding in a swamp for sixty-three years now the coming August.

"Ain't you mine, body and soul, you black rascal?" he demanded, turning to me, and himself replying in the deeper tones of an aged black—"No, no, master, my soul may belong to you, but my body has been incorporated under the laws of Iowa and you don't own a dollar of the stock."

The girl again laughed at this arrant nonsense and promised that we should have the tenderest steaks for our evening meal.

Later at a barber's I was shaved, Sooner warning me not to tell the fellow my life story and also suggesting that the thatch be shorn, by which he meant that my hair was to be cut.

Our performance that night was quite up to our hopes, the town skinning handsomely, and we rejoiced at fresh proof that we had thrown our pursuer off the scent.

Our hotel in the following town was rather like the first, though naïvely named the Palace, and again my friend wheedled the dining-room maid into extra effort by lavish gifts of the perfume and his tricks of flattery.

Here also our evening's entertainment was cordially received. By this time we had ceased to be apprehensive of our sleuth.

On the morrow we breakfasted at a late hour and in a leisurely manner, having no great way to our next town. We then proceeded to the garage where our car was stored, had its oil and gas replenished and were off for another delightful day in the open, my companion and I both in the highest spirits. To the very fullest we were now enjoying this life of seeming vagabondage that was yet inspired by a serious purpose. We drove slowly the length of the main street, receiving the stares of hicks and yaps, and turned into a shaded avenue leading to the highway.

And, as we made the turn, Bertrand Meigs from the far curb waved his pennant full at us in a sort of battered triumph. His ulster was across his arm, his jaunty straw hat had suffered damage, and his loud suit of checks was in sad need of a pressing iron. His collar was not fresh and his cravat sat awry. Altogether he was unkempt and had too plainly not been well looked after during his captivity. But his pennant was flaunted full in our faces and I suffered a moment's pang of compunction. Truly there was something gallant in the fellow. He had been cruelly rebuffed, roughly misused, I did not doubt, yet would not give over his idiotic pursuit.

Sooner flinched when his glance caught the pennant, his joyous exuberance of the moment before going instantly and leaving him in a state of collapse. He tried to curse, but his effort was feeble. The man seemed really at a loss for words as he drove on, like

an automaton now, his dulled eyes fixed ahead. I was the first to recover.

"Dash it all! Perdition take the fellow!" I broke out, forgetting myself in the first exasperation. My companion, pricked doubtless by my own violence, recovered something of his spirit and stopped the car. Two blocks back Meigs stood on the corner, and when he saw us again waved. I reminded myself that at least he had not performed his lunatic dance.

Sooner spoke briskly. "It's like this. That bird needs handling [remonstrance] if ever a bird did. But I go do it, and where am I for thirty days, maybe? Also it would have you running for the end book [unprotected] because whatever this bird aims to put over on you he'd do it while I wouldn't be there to look after you." He leaned out to shake a fist at the figure, and received a jaunty flirt of the pennant in answer. As we drove on he added, "I could also go back and have him pinched again, but what good does that do? He don't stay pinched. What this problem demands is strategy. I got to think."

"Hang it all!" I burst out again. "It seems as if we have the very fiend to deal with." I could not confide my full fear to Sooner, which was that presently Bertrand Meigs would be joined by Mrs. Copplestone, with whom, I had little doubt, the weak-minded fellow would have communicated. I earnestly hoped my friend would think to some purpose.

"If we could only," I said, "apprise those in control of some near-by booby-hatch——" But I was sternly gestured to silence. My friend was thinking intensely, and for the next hour remained preoccupied, merely

permitting himself now and then a coarse expression in disparagement of our tormentor.

At length he brightened, saying he had received an inspiration but would keep it on the griddle for a time, it being his rule of life not to act impulsively. During this interim he chatted of other things, telling me several anecdotes about himself to illustrate his superior powers of ratiocination under pressure.

"I ain't never lost a battle yet," he confessed, "where cold thinking would win. The only trouble now is that this bird is highly crazy and no rule of strategy can be depended on. He won't play by rule. But trust the master mind. That bird is going to carry the curse of an aching heart before many days." Once more my friend became immersed in his problem, and for another hour was silent except for confidential asides to himself. By the growing confidence in the tone of these I saw him at last to believe that he had baffled our hanger-on.

"Yep, I got it," he announced with quiet certainty. "It's a grand idea. It's the new plush ulster of ideas [logically sound] if I do say it myself. It's kind of desperate and requires a lot of brain work. But that pin-head is going to get his. In about a week or ten days he's going to wish he hadn't gone against the claw and fang of Nature's wildest animal which is peaceful when not annoyed but poison if pestered—meaning me."

"Will it take so long?" I asked, fearing the fellow might in that time betray my whereabouts.

"The longer the better," replied Sooner. "But you'll be safe from the start, and when you see me again I'll be wearing that snake's hide for a hatband."

With these mystifying words I was forced to be content, for my companion again became uncommunicative. After a bit he halted at a crossing and consulted a road map he carried, so that I fancied his first device would be to change our hunting route. Going on, he took a road that led us close by a railway track, and presently far ahead I could see a town much larger than those we had been accustomed to entertain.

He now drove slowly and began to scrutinize certain pedestrians we passed or who loitered along the railway line. These I recognized as tramps or vagrants. Several such he accosted and engaged in conversation; once he left the car and went to where a group of these shiftless fellows had made a sort of camp near a bridge. Here he chatted for some time and I saw him closely survey two of the chaps whom he caused to stand up. He returned and we drove on.

"This is a delicate part of the job," he confided to me. "One false step might ruin all."

I did not ask questions, but now I guessed his plan, which, as he had remarked, would be a desperate one. He meant to select from among these ne'er-do-wells one with sufficient criminal enterprise to put Bertrand Meigs beyond the power of molesting us; perhaps to send a bullet crashing through his brain—a dose of cold lead, as one of Leffingwell's adventure stories had it—though I hoped that this extreme measure would not be found imperative. It seemed to me that we might be as well served if one of the fellow's legs could be fractured, which would for a long time relieve us of his exasperating attention. However, I did not annoy my companion by making suggestions, and at any rate

he had not yet discovered a suitable tool for this retributive act of violence.

We were now within a few miles of the city and, after taking a grass-margined side road for a little distance, neared a thinned plantation of trees to which an arched gateway gave access. Across this arch ran the rustic lettering "Free Auto Camp Grounds," and under it our car passed. Pausing only to select a suitable location, we were presently ensconced in a sheltered nook between two other parties of campers who favored us with but casual stares as my companion directed me to assist him in unloading certain bits of our equipment. Among these was the strip of canvas that had before served as our shelter, also several other pieces of the same material, together with ropes and poles that to my eye formed a confusing jumble, yet from which my companion assembled and erected a small but commodious tent. Into this he directed me to take my own blankets, pillows and the few personal belongings I had acquired.

The fellow was still curiously taciturn and so grim of manner that I maintained my policy of asking no questions. He now, after cautioning me not to venture beyond the arched gateway, entered the car and drove away, saying enigmatically, "I will be here when I return," and I, left thus to my own devices, began to explore my novel surroundings.

Before our tent, half screened by the plantation of trees, was the road we had come along. Back of the tent a few yards ran a tiny stream from which I saw the free campers obtain their water supply. On our left as I stood at the door of our shelter, a motor car

served as the back wall for a camp, canvas being stretched from its top to the ground, and before this sat a fashionably dressed woman of great beauty in a camp chair, reading a magazine with a gaudy cover, while near by, over a small fire, her far less fashionably dressed husband—so I took him to be—was engaged in some intricate feat of cooking. Twice, as I looked, the woman addressed him impatiently. He seemed to be doing it wrong. And once she glanced up at me, though but briefly, and I thought with some disrelish as her eyes again fell to her reading.

At my right was a far more elaborate camp with a tent of considerable size and in the space before it a small stove, a table on which were magazines, and another table which I saw would be for kitchen use. Stretched between two trees was a narrow banner reading, with a witty misspelling that I saw to have been intentional, Kamp Kozy. And it did, indeed, appear cozy, not only by reason of the table of magazines, the chairs standing about, on one of which a piece of sewing reposed, the homelike canvas structure, its flaps pinned hospitably back, but because of the neat and active woman who busied herself between the smaller table and the hot stove, calling from time to time to one or another of four children who played at childhood games or performed tasks she gave them, such as replenishing the stove with firewood or fetching water from the brook.

The woman being absorbed in her work, I felt at liberty to study her. She was of a sturdy build, not tall, her carefully arranged hair of a warm tint and her wholesome broad face abundantly freckled. She

was neatly gowned in something of a faded blue that seemed to have been often laundered, its sleeves rolled to her elbows, and she was protected from her work by a spotless white apron. She was undoubtedly a capable woman, well equipped for this wild life in the open. Her every skilled move, as well as her rather coldly shrewd gray eyes, when I at last glimpsed them, told of a sure competence.

Beyond these immediate neighbors, as I saw after venturing a little way before our tent, were other camps extending in either direction, all of them, I felt certain, interesting and instructive could I have been privileged to observe the hicks that occupied them. But for the present I must remain close to our own tent, so I sat upon a section of felled tree near by and lost myself in reflections upon my curious position and the amazing incidents that had marked my course since the unfortunate burning of the Leffingwell home.

Sitting there in this abstraction, I must have absently removed my aboriginal wig, for I was startled by a child's high voice crying out, "Ma, ma, this old Indian is, too, a scalper—he's just scalped his self!"

Glancing up in some dismay I saw that the four children of my right-hand neighbor stood in line at a little distance, staring at me with wide eyes. They were dressed alike in overalls of blue, held up by straps over their shoulders, and might all have been boys, though the speaker had seemed to be a small girl.

I stood up in some embarrassment, and now became aware that smells of the most savory cooking assailed me from either side. My left-hand neighbor had completed his task and, though his wife was being petulant

about it at table, I could guess that she had no valid reason for complaint, while from Camp Cozy—as I prefer to spell it—the scents were of a hot pastry and I saw that the mother was removing several fresh-baked pies from her oven to the table. It was now well into afternoon and Sooner had left me without food. Since we had eaten no luncheon I suppose it is true that I did stare at the not distant pastry in a manner that might have been thought suggestive.

As I stood thus the woman glanced up from the table and, through a faint but gracious mist from her product, suddenly demanded in a voice sharp with hostility, “What are you leering at me for, you old scoundrel?”

I took a few quick steps toward her, wounded more than I can say by the outrageous offense she had imputed to me.

“Madam,” I exclaimed, “I am shocked beyond measure that you should so grossly have misconstrued my intention. My expression may have been too pointed—you may even have been justified in describing it as a leer. I have lately consorted with rough men, madam, and it is possible that the lines of my face have lost the sharper edge of their native refinement. If I did, indeed, leer, I beg you to believe it was not at yourself but at the product of your skill, which I am certain is exquisite both in flavor and texture—details in which the pie of commerce, I have learned, falls lamentably short. Once again, I beg, madam, that you will acquit me of anything but a sincere compliment that no true artist should resent.” With this apology and, I hoped, justification, I bowed deeply and was retiring to the seclusion of my tent when I was stayed by the lady.

"Wait a minute, mister," she called with a change of manner, and I turned to find that she had drawn nearer, standing now beside her little ones, who still stared at me in a lively manner. "Ain't you a real Indian?" she inquired earnestly.

"I will not attempt to mislead you, madam," I frankly told her. "I am not of the aboriginal race. It is true I have masqueraded as such for reasons I feel loth to communicate at this moment, and I may say that I have done so with rather a telling effect, having on only one occasion failed to create a perfect illusion by reason of quoting some mere Latin that was unhappily too well understood by an ill-mannered bystander."

"Latin?" queried the good soul with renewed interest. "Do you know Latin?"

"As well as one may be said to know a tongue not any longer in common use," I replied modestly.

"And Greek—I suppose you know Greek?"

I assented; this language was also mine.

"And can you read and write them, too?" pursued my interlocutor.

"Naturally," I answered. And seeing the woman betray an interest in this matter I added that much of my lighter reading was in these tongues. "Yet the Greek is preferable," I explained. "Plato, the mighty Athenian, is faultless. No Roman is. If you read him with attention I am certain you will find Cicero wordy, over-rhetorical, consciously academic. Livy again, you will feel is too consciously aware of his words, far too diffuse. Tacitus, on the other hand, carries conciseness into obscurity and, too often, epigram into paradox.

If you insist on Latin prose I would recommend what I myself value most, the soldierly simplicity of Cæsar."

"Do you hear that, children?" the woman exhorted her offspring, then again addressed me in explanation. "I always tell them to listen real carefully when we meet a good conversationalist, and I must say you talk in a more refined manner than a body would think from the sight of you. I bet you know a lot of things to be learned from education—geography and history, and so forth."

Seeing no harm in the revelation I replied, "I have specialized in history, madam."

"What year did Napoleon Bonaparte die in?" she quickly demanded, and at once I was covered with confusion, for, search my mind as I would, I could discover no answering date. Realizing in the same flash that neither did I know the date of his birth, I forestalled this question and clouded the issue of her first by replying that minor oddments of this sort could not be permitted lodging room in a mind devoted to vital history. "But if," I reminded her, "you wish me to trace the growth of civilization in Egypt and the East, I can perhaps be found at home, as the saying is. I might throw a new light for you on the almost naïve idealism of Greece and at the same time bring out in sharp contrast the materialism of Rome. In Egypt, for example, the Memphite civilization, the Theban dynasties, the Saite revival—all have their points of fascination to an inquiring mind like yours, while to trace the union of the Doric and Ionic in Greece——"

But I was interrupted by words at which I could take no offense, though I should presently have reached the

Hellenistic period and the spread of Greek art to the colonies.

"My goodness!" exclaimed the lady. "I don't wonder you lost track of Napoleon. I would myself. But I do wish you would go on, because it's bound to improve the minds of my chits here, and I love your language." Here she glanced back to the cooking table she had left, and again turned to me. "Do set up and have a bite to eat with us. I would adore to have you, Professor."

"Madam," I replied, "I am not no professor, I am a plain gink or bimbo, as they are sometimes called, my name being Simms. But if it will not incommode you I shall indeed be pleased to join you at your repast."

And presently I was sitting at the table from which the tallest chit had removed the magazines, while my hostess brought food from her stove. As she did so she reverted to the natural error under which she had labored when she first addressed me so rudely, and I was conscious of queerly divining that she had not been too well pleased to discover that my attention had been all for her pies—and yet my leering at herself she would have found repulsive. I have never pretended that the woman mind is legible to me.

"Of course I knew you had been acting in a perfectly gentlemanly manner, when you explained yourself," the woman said. "You hadn't ever seen me. But there are parties one meets in this life that do stare and leer and ogle you—sex-conscious wretches—you wouldn't believe how many."

I saw that I should make, as it were, an amend under cover, so I replied warmly, "I am quite sure a lady

of your comely appearance must often be offended by the most persistent attentions of that sort."

"Men whose very look is a profanation," she explained as she and the chits took their seats.

"Exactly, madam," I responded, allowing her to fill my plate with a stewlike mixture that I was certain would be palatable.

I am afraid I made, during the early part of the meal, but a poor guest if my hostess had wished more historical information, for I ate with such entire singleness of purpose that she was at length moved to warn me that Napoleon had suffered from eating too fast.

"He got a stomach trouble," she added, "that saddened his whole life."

In my defense, having now eaten largely, I said, "The human body is a chemical machine composed of twenty or more elements——"

"Listen, children," warned the mother.

"It is driven," I resumed, "by the chemical energy from the slow combustion of compounds of carbon. Obviously a complete knowledge of this machine in health and disease is dependent ultimately upon the knowledge of its chemical reactions. In my own case, if you will permit me to become personal, I have observed that in certain advanced stages of hunger my reactions are not only rapid but unerring. Thus, I seem to consume my food too hurriedly, yet experience has shown me—— Of course immature chits like these," I digressed, "should eat very slowly in order to assimilate the materials for bone-building, but in one of my age the bones have all been built—my own bones so effectually that my good friend, Sooner Jackson, lately

called me a bonehead, or person of a strong character."

"So that was the original meaning of the term?" asked my hostess. "I have often wondered, because I have long heard it used by people that are slangy and make it mean something else. Well, well, we live and learn, and I can't say how tickled I am to have had you for luncheon. It has improved both me and the children. And how we should have adored to hear some more about Egypt and the Greek country!"

"Egypt," I began, "is the first of those undulations which civilized societies make on the level surface of history, undulations that seem to be born of nothingness and to return to it after having reached a summit of which we too often have no record save such as survives the weathering of centuries in the form of——" To my annoyance the car of Sooner here entered the camp yard, and that worthy fellow, observing me, seemed stricken with astonishment as he came to the table. "I shall have to be excused," I pleaded. "Another time, perhaps."

"Has he been going?" demanded Sooner of my hostess, to whom as yet he had not been presented.

"He is the most refined conversationalist I and the children have ever heard," said the lady, "and he seems to be thoroughly well informed—well posted, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, I know what you mean," said my friend. "I've traveled with him. He knows what year everything happened, who invented horse-radish, how to cure botts—everything. But just now I want him to show me where he packed our meat-auger," and gallantly he swept his hat off to the lady while I made my adieu.

CHAPTER X

SOONER led me within our tent, where he turned and said sternly, "I suppose you went and told that dame your life story, you poor fish [communicative person]."

"I did nothing of the sort," I sharply replied. "I merely disclosed to the good soul that I am not an Indian."

He regarded me sourly. "I bet that keeled her over. I bet she didn't believe one word of it."

"Then you lose both wagers!" I cried. "I quite easily convinced her that I am not of the aboriginal race."

This seemed to discomfit him and in his embarrassment he changed the subject, saying gravely, "Listen here, Al. Get out of those duds and put these on." He undid a bundle he carried and displayed another set of garments—overalls of a faded blue, a brown shirt of flannel, waistcoat and coat of a dull hue and frayed dingily, a felt hat something like his own in shape though much the worse for wear, and a pair of high boots. "Quality stuff for men who care," he went on. "Get into it and chew a straw and let me hear you say 'By gosh!'"

His manner had again become baffling, but I caught his intention, and began to change into the other garments. Meantime my friend stepped without the tent

and, whistling as if to a dog, called twice, "Here Jo-Jo, here Jo-Jo!"

On this there issued from the car a person I had not noticed, an elderly, dull-looking man, unkempt as to person and wearing a luxuriant gray beard. He was of slight stature, noticeably stooped, with weak blue eyes, and came to us with a shambling gait. He was, I saw, uncertain of what awaited him, and regarded my companion with suspicion. The latter had meanwhile fetched his shaving apparatus from a box and after procuring a basin of water directed the stranger to cut off with our scissors as much of his beard as possible and to soap the remainder thoroughly.

The man did this with timorous shifting eyes, and Sooner then said, "Now the sheep-headed twin from Ecuador must prepare to meet the grim reaper," and seating the fellow on a chair borrowed from our neighbor he began to shave his victim. The latter winced repeatedly during the process and more than once begged to be let off, but Sooner savagely admonished him to keep still or take the consequences, and the operation was presently at an end.

I now for the first time observed that the stranger's face was shaped not wholly unlike mine, being particularly struck, when Sooner had applied the stain, with the resemblance of his nose to my own. It was, I may say, his only good feature, the rest of his countenance being negligible. Such resemblance to me as there was, I mean to say, amounted to no more than a caricature. Then, to my astonishment, Sooner took the hick within our tent and arrayed him in my Indian

costume, including the wig, the moccasins, the necklace of bear's teeth and the splendid war bonnet.

Garbed thus, the stranger, who had manifested a rather whining concern during the process, was seen to be not entirely unlike myself in the same dress. In fact, I dare say, he might have been mistaken for me by people who did not scan him too closely, although in minor details, especially in his bearing, he failed to convey the true savage dignity that I am certain had been remarked in me; nor, I was sure, could he deliver the lines of the part as forcefully—for I now divined that for some reason of his own Sooner would, for this night's work, consent to have the poor fish take my part.

After a few finishing touches on the fellow, and draping my blanket over his shoulders, Sooner turned to me and said with some pride in his work, "There, I knew this lad had the pan [talent] for it. I guess maybe he won't put it over on Hawkshaw, Junior, the world's prize detective!"

"Of course he won't," I heartily agreed. "He stands with no dignity, his gestures lack force, and his glance has no fire in it. You are quite right. Only a child would be deceived."

Sooner now glanced sharply at me, exclaiming, "Well, look who's here! You old he-soubrette [one of unusual histrionic gifts]. Who'd have thought it?" Then to my amazement I saw that I had misunderstood him; he actually believed that Joseph-Joseph, as he called the bum, would, instead of would not, deceive even the keen eyes of Bertrand Meigs, and nothing I could now say would persuade him otherwise. "This

guy may not be up in the dialect," he now concluded, "and I'll cut out his lines a night or two till I've had a chance to rehearse him. But as something to look at I will tell the world that he is your altered ego—no less."

"A night or two?" I quickly cried. "Do you mean that he is permanently to enact this part to which I have given so much care and study?"

Sooner became serious. "Now listen, Al. There is just one way to throw off this bird and his little flag, and that's to toll him so far away he can't ever get back. I don't know how long it'll take, but I'll have him waving his bye-bye-baby-bunting for at least a thousand miles over Nature's rarest gift to the street artist. When I get him far enough I'll spring this dog on him some day and ask if it's his. And when he sees it ain't, I'll ask him what he means by hounding a well-known clubman from pillow to post like he's done to me, and threaten him with a fate worse than death if he don't lay off. By that time he ought to feel foolish enough to go on home and mind his own business for at least twenty minutes. Do you get me, old pal?"

I was obliged to admit that his strategy was soundly framed, if only he had found someone to enact the Indian convincingly. I did not deny to myself that another equally good male soubrette might possibly be found, but I was certain the present choice would lack distinction at critical moments. However, it was too late now for a further search, and, besides, I was troubled by another thought. "And what is to become of me in the meantime?" I demanded.

"That's the only puzzle I ain't worked out yet," replied my friend. "I got to do some headwork on that knotty problem. You certainly brought complications into my peaceful life, Al. I saw the first gray hair in my mirror this very morning, and you know what that means to a professional beauty. Sometimes I wish you had never took a human life." He sighed profoundly, then scanned my new apparel.

"Turn around slow and let me lamp [admire] you once," he directed, and, as I obeyed, "Not so bad for a tryout. Lift one of them pant legs up to the top of your boot, and where's your straw or blade of grass or long splinter to chew like I told you?" I had thought this suggestion trivially meant, but I now found a fallen twig, which I mouthed. "Not so bad," repeated my critic. "Now see if you can say 'By gosh!' as well as you can talk Injun."

"By gosh!" I said, trying to give the tepid oath character.

"No; say it like this. 'Be gosh!' Say, 'Be gosh, Si, crops is lookin' purty fine round these parts, bean't they?'"

I repeated the jargon, and after three trials succeeded in delivering it with the nasal effect he desired. On this he also taught me other oaths—"By heck!" and "I swan!" with which I must interlard my rendering of what I now understood to be the yap or pastoral dialect. Then, for some moments my friend sat on the felled tree, immersed in a profound meditation.

"The trouble with you, you poor sap [a gentleman]," he said at last as I stood near him chewing my twig, "you can't be trusted away from someone

capable of serious thought. I sometimes consider you to be the biggest fish unpickled [of a studious habit] when it comes to looking out for yourself. What I ought to do is put you in an old gentlemen's home where you could play pachisi or watch the goldfish in the fountain or pick geraniums or something, and not be let out of the yard. But I don't know any such place. On the other hand, if I put you on your own it won't be no time till they have you looking out of a little furnished room with stone walls, telling some law gent how you was plenty justified when you turned the old rod loose. I've worked hard to save you from that, Al, and I take so much pride in my so-far success I don't want to see you queer it by some piece of old-woman blatting [a kind of fancy needlework]. What you really need is a keeper, someone kind but firm as granite."

"If your general meaning is that I need companionship," I said, "I grant you I do. For example, I greatly delighted in my association with yonder excellent woman," and I pointed to our neighbor, still actively engaged at her household tasks. "It is a long time since I have so pleasantly relaxed in a congenial atmosphere. You surely cannot expect me to go out and speak in my farm dialect to the birds and beasts of the field," I concluded in a burst of sarcasm.

My friend did not at once reply, but I saw his eyes follow that comfortable female figure as she went to and fro from her again hot stove to her small table. Suddenly they lighted and he turned to me with a new animation.

"Say, Al, on the level, it did seem like you made

good [conducted yourself irreproachably] with that lady forest-ranger."

"She misjudged me only for a moment," I replied. "It is probable that I did stare too openly at her incomparable pies, though I doubt even yet that my look could have been called a leer. I should say that a liquid glance would have been the more fitting description."

Without deigning me a reply my friend entered our tent, emerged presently with what I saw were some flasks of the little wonder potion, together with some vials of the rare essence, and crossed briskly to our neighbor's domain, where, after presenting her his gifts with a courtly sweep of his hat, he engaged her in a long and earnest conversation, during which they both from time to time would glance back at me. Once I saw Sooner tap the side of his forehead with his finger tips and observed the lady nod as if understanding the pantomime, as of course she would, for I had already taken the pains to let her know that my friend considered me a rather unusual bonehead. A moment later I was beckoned to join them.

"It's all fixed, old pal," said Sooner, while the lady nodded cordially. "You are to hole up over there in the tent and she will look after you. I have explained to her that my professional duties call me to a distant part of the state and that it may be some weeks before I return. I shall leave with her a sum of money ample for your chow [incidental expenses] and I trust you will give her as little trouble as possible."

"I am sure Mr. Simms will produce no annoyance," put in the good soul. "He is very select in his con-

versation and I consider him an improving example to have about the children."

"Oh, he's no rowdy," replied Sooner in a laughing manner; "I've never known him to bite a child."

In the presence of a lady I did not altogether relish this crude chaffing, so I retorted with rather an acid sarcasm, "I trust I have at least the instincts of a sap, and I dare say, even after your watchful care is withdrawn, I shall be able to conduct myself as one."

Sooner seemed about to guffaw again at his own poor jest, but decided, apparently, that I would tolerate no more of his humor in another's presence, for he suppressed his coarse mirth and replied, "There, there, Al, you must overlook the rough speech of an old army officer. I am certain you will conduct yourself as a perfect sap under any and all circumstances, and I am sure this lady has the same confidence in you. And now, madam"—he turned from me to her—"I trust that all is understood. From time to time I shall write to this shrimp [business associate] giving news of my travels. And there will be addresses at which he can reach me should it become necessary for him to move on—though Pete knows I hope it won't. I should like to think he wasn't going to step outside that gate till I get back."

With these words we returned to our own tent, where Sooner now completed his preparations for leaving with my substitute. The latter had been posturing and parading in his blanket and making crude attempts to comport himself as a true aboriginal. Curiously enough the costume had seemed to bring out all the man's latent egotism, which, I guessed, was ordi-

narily but moderate. Already, indeed, he rather keenly fancied himself in the new rôle. Posing in a laughable attempt at dignity before his employer, he gruffly uttered the words "Ugh, ugh! Me heap big chief—drink much firewater!" receiving instantly the rebuke his vanity deserved.

"Listen, Chief Horsehair," said Sooner, "snap out of that firewater stuff. If it was raining firewater you wouldn't get as much as you could catch on a fork. Understand that—not while you're in my pay."

"Oh, very well, cull [sir]!" replied the fellow, though sullenly, I thought. As for his attempt at the Indian speech, I was positive it would never be more than slightly gazukus. On this account—for it would mean that our business would suffer by reason of another taking my rôle—and because I must part from one for whom I felt a warm regard, I was much cast down, though resolving to conceal this from Sooner, and present a cheerful face at his going.

When at last he had taken his seat in the car I half jokingly addressed him in the agricultural patois he had taught me. "Sooner, be heck and gosh, me heap big swan, and the crops hereabouts are thriving magnificently. I shall remember all your directions and hope to see you at an early day, by jabbers!" And on this I warmly wrung the good fellow's hand.

"Murder!" was his only response, and once again he warned me, "Don't you dare set foot outside that gate or I'll have the law on you." With this he drove off, his so-called Indian bridling with complacency as they went.

I turned and saw that our neighbor had drawn

near and had also waved a cordial farewell to my partner.

"Your friend has an awfully magnetic personality," she said. "I do hope we have not seen the last of him."

"He is a diamond in the rough, madam," I replied—"one of Nature's true bums with a heart of gold; ungrammatical at times, yet always finely the sap."

But not until I retired to my gipsy couch that night did I suffer a full realization of my loss. I saw that I had come to rely on the excellent Sooner Jackson in perhaps too many ways. During our enforced separation, therefore, I must burnish my self-reliance, cultivate the initiative. I had powers of my own, I was glad to believe, which my friend had not suspected. From his own assumed dominance he had been too ready to consider me helpless in this wild life.

I thought, too, of Fergus Jessup with his whimsical picture of me as a toy balloon tugging at its string. How impressed—perhaps envious—the good chap would be were he now aware that the string had indeed been broken after repeated tugging—and that what had been revealed was truly a bell sounding a brazen clangor!

CHAPTER XI

I STILL regard the days that followed as the best of my voluntary exile. They soothed me with a placid, well-ordered charm that I never fail to remember almost yearningly. My friend Sooner, I knew, had a genuine liking for me, yet often I could not help being aware that he enjoyed himself at my expense in some hidden manner, and as a rule he did not accord my opinions in practical matters the respect I felt they deserved. The result had been to render me actually timorous in his presence on many occasions when I should have done better to assert myself.

All this was agreeably changed. The atmosphere of too-often crudely amused tolerance I had been obliged to endure had given place to one of unquestioning deference. The word is not too strong. My most careless utterance was hung upon, my verdicts undisputed; I found eager and respectful listeners when I chose to discourse. It was, I may say, a novel and stimulating sensation to be thus looked up to, treated as a guest of honor not to be rebuked for trifling delinquencies, accorded an ever solicitous courtesy not only by my hostess but by her offspring, whom she never failed to still by an imperative gesture when I spoke.

As to this remarkable woman, I at first found her wholly admirable and, even after learning of her grave transgression, striking treacherously as it did at the

very foundation of our social polity, I cannot bring myself utterly to condemn her, considering that, while the excuses she offered in her defense were trivial and inadequate, she had yet been misled by certain pernicious doctrines widely taught by avowed anarchists who would in their frenzy overturn the civilization we have so painfully builded. Not for some days, however, did my hostess confide to me her shameful delinquency, so that our early encounters found me approving her without reserve.

On that first morning after my side-kick's departure I was called to breakfast and found the card of my hostess thoughtfully left by my plate on the neatly set table. It read:

MRS. PLEASANT B. GALE
ROBES ET MANTEAU. EN ROUTE
FRUIT PUT UP IN SEASON

Observing that I studied the card, my hostess remarked, as she brought her excellent food to the table, "You being my house guest, Mr. Simms, I take pleasure in introducing myself, which, as it says in the best books, I should have done yesterday at our unconventional meeting. I assure you I am not accustomed to striking up acquaintances right and left with every Tom, Dick and Harry."

"I need not be told that, madam," I assured her. "It required only a glance to see that you were not a loose character."

"Well, I should say not!" she replied. "I am leading my own life, but I endeavor to do it like a lady should. I am now engaged in seeing America first, as

I think we always had ought to, after which I shall travel in foreign climes seeing different kinds of natives and so forth in order that my chits may get a good knowledge of the world. We have already learned a lot about our own country, such as that it has the biggest trees, the crookedest railway, the hottest desert, the largest cities, the greatest number of crimes, and every town has once been destroyed by flood or fire, although this, of course, is due to shiftlessness and ought to be stopped. Do you not think so? Or do you, Mr. Simms?"

I was a little chilled by this trick of speech so reminiscent of Mrs. Coppleson, particularly as the speaker did not wait for any response, but launched at once into a truly interesting description of her manner of life. Her livelihood she gained as her business card indicated. She erected her Camp Cozy at a pleasant spot near some thriving town, and being a skilled seamstress she found an abundance of work for her needle. "That card says it in French," she explained, "and I often have to tell what it means. But you'd be surprised how much I get to do, either making new gowns or making over old ones. You take this town we're at—hardly a woman in it that isn't hollering her head off—excuse the vulgar expression—for a good dressmaker."

As to her other work, she told me that after fruit ripened she, being an expert maker of preserves and jellies, derived an even greater income from this gift, as so many housewives lacked the time to do the thing for themselves. In winter it was her custom to wander south, where the weather would not be inclement, and place her chits in a public school.

It was all most interesting—for three years now she had been en route, as her card wittily phrased it—and I saw that the woman was a striking example of energy and shrewdness. She was, I further saw, one of those starved souls clamant for knowledge and hungering after the better things of life. These longings—I permit myself to say—had caused her to welcome so warmly a man of my attainments. They caused her to hang on my words. Avid was she for the finer cultures, particularly those of deportment, speech and table procedure, scarce a meal being had at which she did not remind one or another of her chits that something should be eaten in a different manner. In this connection she now spoke of a recent disappointment.

“We all studied how to eat artichokes properly,” she complained; “we have learned the directions word for word and looked at the picture of one being eaten in a choice way. Then I go to town for some, and there isn’t an artichoke to be found. The little ones are so careless. They may forget what the book says and then be invited out years from now to a refined dinner party where artichokes are served and not know how to behave, or be taken to an expensive restaurant and humiliated like that poor girl who could only think of chicken salad when she should have ordered a swell course dinner from soup to pie.”

I sought to comfort the woman by disclosing to her that artichokes, considered as food, are a mere fallacy; that one may permissibly refuse to touch them, but she seemed fearful that her chits, in declining this difficult vegetable, would be thought to do so from a cultural defect alone. However, the creature was endowed with

a matchless optimism, for she presently cheered up to say, "Now, as you have concluded your breakfast, perhaps you will tell us some more good historical items."

To this I was not loth and while she and the children listened attentively I tried to enlighten them on topics of graver importance than the eating of artichokes, which I have always regarded as a vain ceremony without the slightest food value and calculated primarily for display.

"European history," I said, "is marked by a few sharply delineated periods. For instance, Roman domination ceased when the Emperor Constantine removed his capital to Constantinople, while the so-called Dark Ages came to an end when the dashing Charles VIII of France invaded Italy. Again, the feudal period terminated when that unprincipled but undeniably crafty monarch, Louis XI, insidiously destroyed the power of the nobles and established the unquestioned supremacy of the crown." From this pithy beginning I proceeded to elucidate some of the less significant yet highly picturesque aspects of the three periods, and was obliged to cease only when my hostess regretfully declared that I was detaining her from her work which she must do.

"History improves one a lot," she declared, "and my chits are crazy about it. We could sit and listen all day, but I simply must finish that party dress I promised." And she was presently busy at her sewing machine just inside the portal of her tent, her rather intelligent face absorbed above the humming mechanism, her lips raptly moving from time to time as if she repeated the better bits of my discourse. For myself I had never derived greater enjoyment than from this

informal causerie where I so indubitably brought light into dark places.

For a week, I think, I considered the woman wholly admirable. A marvel of industry, continuously occupied with one task or another, she was almost excessively neat in her dress and most determinedly cheerful, not only to me but to her brood, whom she strove to correct in speech and action. At table, to instance, she would put them through an oral examination as to their knowledge of how food should be consumed.

"Now, chits," she would begin, "if you were a hostess would you wonder why your guests smiled if you served thin-sliced bread for dinner, or when you entered the dining-room last instead of first, or if you let the maid sound the dinner chimes, which a well-trained servant, of course, would not do at a formal dinner?"

Receiving satisfactory and rather glib answers—for the little ones seemed fully instructed as to these emergencies—she would resume. "Would my little men know that they should open only one fold of their napkins if they would not be ridiculed by other guests, and that they should always send knife and fork with the plate for a second helping—though never under any circumstances requesting a second portion of soup? Would my little ladies wonder why Mrs. Mortimer left one of her calling cards and two of her husband's in paying an honor call? And would all of you know what words R. S. V. P. really stand for, or the meaning of the phrases *le beau monde*, *vis-à-vis*, *à la Russe*, *sang-froid* or *ma chérie*? And surely everyone at this table knows they must not drink a beverage without first placing a napkin to their lips, nor would anyone here,

I am sure, be so vulgar as to use a piece of bread as a pusher."

The lore of the woman was amazing, but even more so that of her pupils, who were wise beyond their years. I do not wish to conceal that more than once was I myself instructed. Doubtless I had often caused other guests to smile at my gaucheries. I did not know if a woman should appear in the aisle of a sleeping-car in negligee, nor could I have told if it is correct to eat asparagus with the fingers. I had merely thought it convenient.

It may be guessed, then, that I had come to feel rather an awe of this deeply informed woman, and that I was ill prepared for the shock she gave me on a later day in one of her infrequent moments of leisure. She began by recalling the hard life she had led on a farm in a Western state, until she had found, as she put it, the way out. No labor had been too rough for her, and the daily tasks as she catalogued them fairly stunned me. Her day began with five cows to milk, cream to separate [from what, she did not tell me] and take to the nearest village three miles distant. Sometimes she had to shoe horses before leaving with the separated cream [I tried to picture her as a smith at the forge] and once she helped a neighbor shingle a new barn. She half-soled and repaired the shoes of the family, cut her children's hair, and sometimes that of her neighbors. When her best horse was kicked by another she had put a number of stitches into the wound. She often boarded as many as five laborers. She made her own clothing and that of her children. My brain became in a whirl as she continued the appalling list.

"Every year I would pick sixty quarts of wild blackberries, besides picking and selling five crates of raspberries, and putting up apples and pears and other fruit on the place. It was not a life for one gently reared. I had no time to keep my intellect going. I would be up at five, milking, feeding the calves, pigs and chickens. Then I must clean the house and wash the separator and dishes. Then clean the barn. Next I would cut clover, wheeling it to the barn, cut corn for the cows, and perchance dig potatoes till lunch. After lunch I would pick up and sack the potatoes, then perhaps have to walk three miles before finding the cows. Then there were the chores and getting supper and perhaps a paper to prepare for our next Live Topic meeting.

"One winter I and a neighbor butchered eight hogs and three beeves. After that I had to put two windows in the barn, one in my washroom, and build a wheelbarrow and a mile of fence. I have shot wildcats and a bear that was after our pigs, though I had to sit up three nights to get that bruin. And you can imagine, Mr. Simms, that I had little time for reading the latest magazines or keeping up with the best movements. Yet I was always building air castles. Every year they'd tumble down, but I'd build better ones. And at last one proved durable.

"I shall never forget the day. I got up in the morning with the feeling that release was coming. It never seemed so silly, because we had eight hay balers arriving the next day to board for a week, and the other work was already behind. Then the pump broke and I couldn't get any water. Then I went out and found a big Berkshire dead in the pen. Then a cow swelled up

from too much clover, and keeled over. Then one of the children upset a pan of bread I had put to raise.

"All at once something come over me, and I went in the drawing-room and sat down in the easy-chair like a lady of leisure. Think of it—sitting idle at eleven o'clock in the morning! I seemed to be in a trance. Pretty soon I went and changed my dress, changed the children, took forty-eight dollars which I'd managed to save out in ten years and kept under the mattress, packed us all into the car and left in a hurry—the teakettle steaming away as I went out the door. I've often pictured that teakettle, so busy after it wasn't any use. But I wasn't going to be a man's mere toy or plaything any longer."

"And you have never returned?" I asked, admiring the spirit with which she had shrugged off her burdens.

"Not ever," she confirmed. "I'll never even be caught in the same state again."

I now fittingly condoled with the woman on the loss of her husband; I forget how I put it—some facile commonplace regarding the hardship of wives early widowed; but no sooner had the words left my lips than I was aghast to hear her rejoin, "Widow—me? Not yet. I married the closest man in the state, and he's so mean he'll live to have his centennial birthday or something."

Hardly could my ears believe the brazen words. "You mean," I began, "that you left home without first securing your husband's approval?"

"Mr. Simms," she replied, "you have just heard the work I did on that place. Think, and think carefully. Would I not have had a job getting his approval? Do you think he'd have let a drudge go who was doing

the labor of two men and getting not one cent of pay for it? Little you know that man!"

I was now aghast. "But surely," I objected, "you could hardly have deserted home and husband in the cool manner you describe——"

"Listen again, Mr. Simms. I married while yet in my teens, a schoolgirl romance that lasted till the next day, when I got kicked by a cow I was milking. On the day I quit, the best dress I had was still my wedding dress. My wedding ring actually wore through, and he took what was left and sold it to the jeweler. I never did have another till I bought the one I'm wearing because it looks queer for a woman with children to be without one. I was worked to skin and bones, and this insect—he's a believer in infant damnation—would keep the children from school to slave in the fields. Judson Gale would also tell me I was no longer the woman I had been. Well, now I'm the woman I was, though of course I am not in the first blush of youth, and all because I left in a cool manner, as you call it. Say, if I hadn't left, people long ago would have been saying he was too mean to give me a headstone. I served fair notice on him after I got a thousand miles away. I told him I was through. If he ever wanted to discuss our affairs I would consent to a meeting, but only in friendship's name. He never has looked me up; it would cost too much. And that's that. Dear me, here I sit frittering the time away in idle gossip. I'm getting lazy." And with this the extraordinary creature resumed her endless labors on the sewing machine.

I gazed at her in consternation. It will be readily understood that I no longer regarded her with the ap-

proval she had won from me while I was still ignorant of her delinquency. She had not only deserted—there was no other word for it—home and husband but she was unquestionably one of those poisonous agents that wrought to destroy the very fabric of our domestic life. As she went from home to home, either with her sewing or her preserving of fruit, she sowed the foul seeds of an anarchy that would materially aid in overturning our hard-won civilization. The magazine article I had read spoke also of this lawless ferment in the woman mind that was doing its vicious part, along with our insensate pursuit of pleasure in cabarets where the night life of Paris is reproduced. It was this same toxin, I saw, that had roused in the breast of Mrs. Copplestone her preposterous and unwomanly ambition to be a mayor and have an actual part in men's public life.

And the creature before me was blind to the harm she wrought. "I tell my ill-treated sisters," she had remarked in the course of her frenzied harangue, "that the way out is simple if their souls are worth saving." How little men would suspect—observing her at the ostensible task of preserving berries in their well-ordered homes—that she was a serpent spitting venom that would in time eat away the base of our most sacred institution!

Though it was inevitable that I could no longer approve this evangel of domestic chaos, I could, perhaps, bring her to a better sense of her responsibilities by a diplomatic presentation of them, and thereafter in our little talks at table I took pains to specify the home as the foundation of all we have that sets us apart from

the beasts of the field; that a blow at the home is a blow at all we have learned to cherish. Beginning far back I pictured civilization as having been planted by the first family group, which must have come about shortly after the human hand ceased to have a part in the locomotor function. And from that early day, slowly, painfully, civilization had been built on this simple but stout base—the clinging of the mated pair for the perpetuation of the stable home.

So fervid did I at times become in painting the gradual evolution of the home, its necessity if we were to endure as a people, the urgent need of combating forces that might disrupt it, I feared she might take offense. But so far from this fear having any basis, she heartily agreed with me and would, with that famed feminine inconsistency, even venture remarks of her own to this effect.

“The home is truly in danger, Mr. Simms, as you say,” she calmly told me. “I read it in the papers. Society is rotten to the core; the popping of champagne corks is heard on every hand. We are dancing down the hill to destruction—there was a wonderful drawing of the scene in the paper of last Sabbath—and according to the article that went with it I shall be surprised if the home endures another hundred years. We live in a terrible time.”

It was to me an incredible exposure of a certain blindness in human nature. Never once did the woman take my remarks as in any way reflecting upon herself—she who had deserted and disrupted one home—and contaminated how many others I did not know, by telling her sisters of a way out! I was reminded of one of our

instructors who became addicted to drink and who would discourse on its evils never so fervently as when in his cups. And this wretched history had been making so close about me while I, all unconscious, would probably never have encountered it until it achieved covers!

Feeling no longer the same toward my hostess, I longed with impatience for the return of Sooner, so that I might once more be off to our wild free life. But a letter now reaching me in care of Mrs. Gale gave me no hope of immediate release.

"*Dear Al,*" it ran: "I picked the bird up that same night in the town near which you are at. He was fooled stiff and has shook his fool flag at us in every town we played since. I don't try to fool him, but say in a loud voice, at the end of my apple-sauce, well, friends, tomorrow night I shall be in the town of So-and-so which I will hope will turn out and give me the same rousing welcome as you have done. You understand, Al. It's because now we don't want to lose him, just the opposite of before. He is batty or something, or else why wave a flag every night and giggle at people that never done you a rotten turn in their lives? But we ain't far enough yet to stage the fifth act like I told you, so set tight and be sure to let the alfalfa grow once more. I mean don't trim the tapestry.

"Your old pal, SOONER.

"P. S. Rain stopped the show at Askaloosa and the Chief got potted. I herded him back on the reservation again, but believe me, Al, he is one bad actor."

This last, to be sure, I had known full well as soon as I saw the fellow trying to act.

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER ten days sped by and I began to be irked by my confinement. It was becoming too much like my imprisonment in the foredoomed Leffingwell house. Twice, despite Sooner's injunction not to step beyond the gate, I ventured to stroll the length of the road before our camping ground, noting with interest the little homes that would be set up in this wilderness for a night or two.

Mrs. Gale rather looked down upon her neighbors, calling them fly-by-nights, and feeling, I dare say, something of an old-family pride in her longer time of residence here. Nevertheless I found the gipsy life about us full of color with its overloaded caravans of bedding, household paraphernalia, children and even crates of domestic animals. There were always lively scenes to be observed as these itinerants noisily made their camps for the night, and my walks were happily finished without incident. Not once was I accosted or compelled to deceive anyone by speaking in the out-of-doors farm dialect that Sooner had been at such pains to teach me. I dare say my costume of the approved agrarian mode made me seem to be but a churl living close to the soil, and indeed I took care always to be seen chewing a straw, of which I kept a neat sheaf in my tent for this purpose.

I longed, however, to venture farther, and what was

my delight one day to be told by Mrs. Gale that I might drive her car to the town for certain needed supplies. It was only after long deliberation that she brought herself to give me this permission, but as she worked at a sewing task which must be finished by nightfall and as I could and did assure her that I was an experienced driver, having driven not only cars such as her own but heavy motor-trucks, she at last thought I might be trusted.

Nor did the woman have cause to regret her confidence in me. Except that I forgot two items of thread and buttons which she declared had been her chief reason for sending me—in a wholly natural excitement at being again fearlessly abroad in the world—my journey was had without incident, and the groceries, at least, I brought safely back, rather priding myself on the achievement and by no means dismayed at the trifles I had overlooked.

The expedition, moreover, had been vastly diverting, for at the town's straggling edge along a grassed common I had found a series of tents and booths of the most fascinating character. They seemed to comprise a public entertainment which a broad banner described as Burke's Monster Grand Allied Street Carnival. Varying strains of music chimed discordantly from adjacent tents, happy crowds passed in and out of them or lingered before booths supplying food and various gaily hued beverages, and before one or another a perspiring announcer would be lauding his exhibition and urging the hicks to enter after the payment of a purely nominal fee.

I had no doubt that the most of these were trumpery

affairs scarce worth even the modest admission demanded. About them was a general air of the meretricious, as, for example, the painted canvas showing a young lady of great personal beauty bisected at her slender waist and resting on a pedestal. Such a mutilation I knew to go beyond physiological bounds; therefore trickery would be resorted to. Yet a stream of yaps constantly passed through the door to view this La Belle Clarine, the Anatomical Paradox of the Ages, as the sign brazenly asserted her to be; whereas a moment's thought would have warned them that they were being gulled.

Before one spread of canvas, however, I halted rather longer, particularly as the announcer was not without a real platform effectiveness and seemed himself persuaded of the worth of his attraction, his manner being earnest to the point of fervency. Nor did I doubt, after studying the banner, that he might have some justification for his warmth. It was a wild man he extolled and his banner revealed the fearsome creature at the very moment of his capture in the lowlands of Madagascar.

It seemed that a band of our intrepid sailors from a warship, having missed one of their comrades and fearing foul play, had landed in this desolate spot and come upon signs all too eloquent that the lost man had met a terrible fate. There stood at bay a creature of a giant's stature, half-beast, half-man, as the announcer described him. Covered with hair from his ferocious head to his waist, he brandished a knotted club in one mighty arm and in the other held a human thigh bone which, all too obviously, he had been gnaw-

ing. The gallant sailors were about to cast over him a great net which they carried, and I learned that this had indeed been the method of his capture.

The scene was dramatically painted and I had no doubt the creature would be worth seeing at the small sum asked. Even as I looked the announcer broke off his torrent of oratory and stood in a listening attitude, one hand to his ear, the other gesturing silence to the crowd before him. Clearly from the inclosure at his back came growls of the most intense rage and the rattle of chains, but the announcer assured his hearers, saying, "But have no fear, ladies and gentlemen, this demon is well secured."

Regretfully I drove on because at this moment a coarse-appearing youth, holding by their strings a great number of toy balloons, hailed me as he drew near my car.

"Howdy, Si," he called. "How's crops?"

He did not in the least resemble one engaged in agricultural pursuits, yet I replied in my dialect, "Wurra, wurra, by heck, crops are really most promising in these parts." Before he could engage me further I left, as I doubted my ability to sustain the character at any length.

Regretting the wild man, whom I determined to view at another time, I also allowed my mind to dwell upon the neighboring booth, where one of the most beautiful women I have ever beheld was serving refreshments. "See That Fat Woman, the Hamburger Queen," her sign read; with the additional line, "Boys, we make them big. Mustard and Onions Extra." But it was the woman herself who engaged my notice. I have said

that she was beautiful. Not with a classic severity, it is true, but running, rather, to a most gracious and appealing amplitude. Technically perhaps her sign did her no gross injustice in the phrase "that fat woman," yet one would not, I reflected, unless miserably poor in words, so describe this queenly person. Her lovely rounded arms, revealed to the elbow, were magnificently large, but not fat in the accepted sense. Also they were of a dazzling whiteness, as was her broad, low brow—classic, this, at least—beneath its smoothed mass of lightish brown hair, and her plump face except where a tinge of the shyest pink showed in either full cheek. Nor was this coloring, of a *bisque* daintiness, artificial, as so often happens in these later days. The woman was natural; she radiated a vast serenity, and the light of her gray warm eyes was the light of a knowing benevolence. She reminded me of something I had often before felt, that beauty lies deeper than line or color. I had watched her serving hungry patrons at the counter she graced, always with unruffled calm as one at the edge of troubling activities but untouched by them. Almost I had watched her to the neglect of the perhaps more striking portrait of the wild man.

I should visit this place again, I thought, not only obtaining a view of the wild person—perhaps even witnessing the anatomical paradox, though well I knew she must be done by fraud—but I should also purchase some hamburger of the beautiful woman and engage her in conversation, so richly did her personality exhale a soothing balm.

Returned safely to the camp ground, Mrs. Gale

showed faint signs of annoyance when she discovered I had forgotten those two most important items of my errand; but she soon recovered her equanimity, frankly declaring that a brilliant man of education and refinement having large affairs to occupy his mind, could hardly be expected to concern himself with trifles like thread and buttons—thus revealing a breadth of view, a talent for appreciation, that might well have put to shame a certain other critic of mine. Whatever the woman's moral bluntness, she did not lack these fine perceptions, and we had presently forgotten the incident in looking over the illustrated section of a newspaper I had obtained.

There were, I recall, some views of an Egyptian tomb recently excavated. Mrs. Gale declared she would some day view this large example of antiquity, as she put it. Her comments on other pictures were always acute. Thus, of a Russian dancer she observed, "She must be very light on her feet," and of a so-called diving Venus she remarked pithily, "She must be very fond of the water." She was, it seemed to me, one whose keen mind would always govern her impulses.

The following day, to my great satisfaction, Mrs. Gale announced that I might once more make the trip to town for other supplies and see—as she jokingly put it—if I could again forget the thread and buttons which were by now urgently needed.

It may be imagined with what delight I set off, having resolved to tarry at the Burke Monster Carnival, where I would again view the superbly ample goddess emblazoned as the Hamburger Queen, and perhaps some of the lesser but still edifying half-human marvels.

Indeed I was thrilled as I mused upon what the day might hold for me, and so absorbed that I perhaps did not closely enough regard the road at my first turning.

At any rate I was rudely shocked from my meditation by a metallic grating, at the same instant feeling Mrs. Gale's car in contact with a foreign mass that well-nigh overturned it. I came to a stop, perforce, realizing immediately, as an experienced driver will, that a collision had occurred. I thought quickly with the presence of mind that had already served me in emergencies, even before I observed the clumsy driver of the other car. Knowing from the past that people under these circumstances are almost invariably moved to a silly rage, I resolved to pretend an ignorance of English. Recalling that the Indian stain was not yet worn from my map, I stepped from the car and confronted the fellow at fault, who was by now on the ground surveying our interlocked cars. I saw he was, happily, not a formidable person; an elderly gray-bearded hick in a dark suit not too well brushed, wearing spectacles over pale eyes and presenting altogether an appearance of troubled futility. I could dispose of him with ease in my aboriginal guise.

"Ugh, ugh!" I exclaimed angrily. "Me heap big chief, by heck!"

The yap straightened up from his study of our bent fenders, stared at me with his ineffectual eyes and said, "Bless my soul, an Indian!"

"Wurra, wurra! No speakum English," I retorted, and, pointing resentfully to the wrinkled fender of my own car, I burst into impassioned Greek, meaning to convey that I regarded him as wholly at fault.

At this his face lighted oddly, and wiping his brow he said in amazed tones, "Dear me, and yet you speak Greek! How curious!" Forthwith he returned me Greek for Greek, as one might say, rather delighting, I saw, in his fluency.

By this time it was plain I need not fear the fellow, as his whole manner expressed apology rather than the truculence I had so often met with under somewhat similar circumstances. Accordingly I abandoned the Indian language and addressed him in the farm dialect, intending from my first general remark to progress to details of the affair in hand.

"Howdy, Si," I began. "By jabbers, are not the crops hereabouts really marvelous!"

The poor chap looked more confused than ever. "Bless my soul!" he again exclaimed. "Then you're not an Indian?"

"Of course not, you poor sap," I laughingly answered, wishing to put him at his ease.

"You do amaze me," he replied. "I guessed you to be a graduate of Carlisle."

"I am of the Nordic race," I explained, "but, having lived much among rough people, I fell into the Indian habit of speech on observing this accident in which I fear you are wholly at fault." I did not wish this to be forgotten in our exchange of courtesies.

"My dear sir," he hastened to reply, "there can be no doubt that I was the culpable party in this unfortunate affair. The annoyance you may have read in my face was wholly with myself." He studied me a moment and his manner became simple and confiding. "I see no harm in telling you that I am not often let to drive

this car myself. Fairly enough, I doubt not, because there is probably some bit of truth in the contention that I am given to spells of absent-mindedness. And just now I was particularly chagrined because I came out today against the repeated expostulations of my wife, Mrs. Hemingway, who was too busy to accompany me. She will, I fear, be outspoken when she learns of our collision." And he broke off to run a weak white hand over the crumpled fender of his car.

I was affected curiously by this speech, seeming weirdly to be observing my own self in the man. "Are you," I asked on a sudden impulse, "by any chance an educator?"

He smiled weakly and replied, "How well you read me! I am Doctor Hemingway, and hold the chair of history in yonder university." He pointed to a distant rise in the landscape. "You can from here see the memorial clock tower showing above our maples."

Again I was oddly moved, seeing that here, but for the grace of God and an uncommonly boneheaded firmness of will, stood Algernon Copplestone, but I dissembled this embarrassing consciousness.

"I had already observed your tower," I said, "though I had not connected it with an institution of learning. I thought it, indeed, to be a silo more than usually ornamented, erected by some hick with a mania for decoration. But I am extremely glad to meet you, Doctor Hemingway. I am Addison Simms of Seattle."

On this we shook hands warmly, and I noted that here was the first person hearing my assumed name who had not professed some acquaintance with the individual I alleged myself to be; nor did he receive my

announcement, as had sometimes happened, with a waggish lift of the brows.

"It has been a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Simms," he cordially replied. "But suppose we separate these unruly contrivances that brought us together and appraise the actual damage."

Hereupon we drove our cars apart and to either side of the road where they could not impede traffic, and ascertained that the damage to each was slight; no more than bent fenders which a mechanic would make little of. Knowing only too well, however, that the poor chap would be poignantly anticipating the remarks of his wife when she learned of even so trifling a mishap, I suggested a course that had once served me well.

"If you will allow the suggestion, Doctor Hemingway," I said, "would it not be well to have this fender restored before you return home? Might you not in that way avoid—I am sure you will pardon the blunt words—certain regrettable infelicities?"

He regarded me with a shrewd eye revealing all too plainly that he had a vein of cunning in him. "I see, Mr. Simms, that you are a man of the world." He completed his speech with a sly smile and a broad wink.

"*Et ego Arcadia vincit*," I lightly explained, not at all meaning him to sense the bitter sarcasm of it; and, indeed, it went well over the poor sap's head.

"You must have lived in many an Arcady," he replied musingly; and then with a quite heart-pricking pathos, "You have lived the world over, no doubt; you know men and cities. And perhaps you won't be amazed

if I tell you that I, too, have often yearned to be abroad in precisely what seems to be your vagabondish fashion—the term implies no criticism; the contrary, rather. There are times when I long for freedom—the word is hackneyed, but perhaps you will get my meaning—freedom from the dull round of academic tasks that have in this day become well-nigh menial, as if I cleaned the boots or looked after the linen of inattentive cubs; freedom, as well, from certain corroding—I believe ‘regrettable infelicities’ to have been your thoughtfully chosen term.”

Again I pinched myself, in thought, as the saying is, to make sure I did not listen to an old self of mine, now as happily outworn as the moth’s empty cocoon. The poor boob gripped me with this longing which I well understood. But, I wondered, would he be sufficiently a bonehead, would he have the stoutly metaled fiber of resolution to dare the fabled fourth dimension? I doubted it. In face and figure he was not unlike myself, and he had the look of one who has suffered, but I felt a lack. Not yet had he been brought to the ultimate heights of a manly desperation. But might I not help him to mount, sow a seed of daring that would presently burgeon?

“Doctor Hemingway, you poor old sap,” I said impressively, “I know your daily round of endurance better than you could suspect. And I wish only to hint that there is always a way out if one has the courage.”

His head shook a slow, decided negative. “You do not know my wife, Mrs. Hemingway,” he very simply replied.

Nor could I, of course, disclose to him how well I

knew her. I must feign ignorance of a woman whose characteristics I could have delineated in a manner to astound him. But I did not give up entirely.

"You have a comfortable residence, I dare say, on a pleasant street not too far from the university grounds."

"You have again guessed correctly," he replied. "Our home is modest, but on a most attractive avenue."

"Maple Avenue?" I could not keep myself from suggesting.

"Walnut," he corrected me.

"And attractive homes of neighbors lie on either side of you?"

"You have a gift for visualizing," he conceded.

"Very well; and from time to time one or another of these families departs for a greater or less time, leaving the house vacant, the curtains drawn."

"True. Even now one of our neighbors has left for a month. I noticed only this morning an accumulation of newspapers before the door."

"And in the kitchen of that house," I proceeded, trying to make my tone significant, "there is sure to be a store of tinned foods such as would nourish a man for several days, while above-stairs are beds, comfortable beds, waiting to be slept in."

"All true enough, Mr. Simms, I have no doubt, but I don't quite see how the unguarded premises of our neighbor——"

He broke off. His manner invited me to detail, but I could go no further. I had given him a sufficient hint; my words had been rich in suggestion to a man fit for high emprise. I myself in his plight had not

needed so plain a cue. I had not known for certain that the Leffingwell house contained food. Yet a mere glance at its blank exterior had been enough for me. I recalled now the moment when I paused before it, reflecting upon the gracious silence within, and how in a flash at that moment I had conceived my ingenious plan of occupying it until I could disguise myself and make an escape. I recalled the later cool determination with which I had carried out this plan, perfected to the last detail, barring of course the unfortunate behavior of the antiquated oilstove. Yet such was my sympathy with this boob I could not resist another shot.

"Some day," I said, "you will pause before that untenanted house and recall my words. You will later devise a way of inconspicuous entry and find that you have actually vanished into what our non-Euclidian geometrists glibly define as the fourth dimension, thus demonstrating what they maunder about but never do demonstrate. You will be in the world, but no longer of it. Nor need you ever be of it again unless you choose."

His face, as he listened, had become blank with confusion. "I shall remember your words," he replied, "though at the moment I hope you will pardon me if I am unable to glean their precise intention. I have never really had the least talent for mathematics."

"Are you a toy balloon tugging at its string," I sternly demanded, "or are you a bell that could clang a brazen tongue?"

Hemingway was now frankly uneasy, and I could see that he would prefer to drop this topic. During

our talk he had absently taken from the seat of his car a volume which I recognized, and I charitably diverted our conversation to that. "You have, I see, Volume Four of a work from which I have derived much enjoyment."

"Ah, the Cambridge Medieval History," he responded eagerly. "You know it, then? I, too, have found the performance most able, and especially this fourth volume, in which mooted questions of theology and church politics have been treated in an admirable spirit of impartiality."

"You will find it also," I suggested, "newly pointing a truth not a little obscured heretofore: that the civilization of the Empire continued that of ancient Greece. The long line of Greek historians is unbroken through the centuries from the fifth B.C. to the fifteenth A.D., a circumstance the significance of which has not always been recognized by the yaps who presume to write today's Outlines. Change, the Empire did; in a sense it became Byzantine; but it never ceased to be Roman, though it became Greek, too, if you know what I mean. Politically it was for Europe, and for that civilization which Greece had created and Rome had inherited and diffused—the great bulwark against Asiatic aggression. Indeed, it may well be said, old top, that it was owing to the heroic and continuous resistance which the Empire made to the barbarian hicks and boobs that the tide was checked before it could reach the western home of ancient culture; that St. Peter's, in short, did not suffer the fate of St. Sophia."

"Quite true, quite true, my dear sir," replied the poor gink with warmth, already forgetting, as I had

meant him to, the drab degradation in which he must continue for want of cold initiative. "And I have been especially delighted by the clear manner in which this volume of a noble work approaches, in its historical aspect, the iconoclastic controversy along all its stages. It is excellently done, though I wonder if you will agree with a criticism I have to offer—that full justice is perhaps not done to the theology of St. Theodore of Studium."

I replied that I agreed most heartily with him, having felt the same lack, and we seated ourselves on a stretch of sward by the wayside. Other points were now brought up on which we agreed or, as chanced with a few, disagreed, and before either of us was aware of it we had talked away the afternoon there on a country road; not unprofitably, to be sure, for we had reenforced each other's conviction that the old view of the Eastern Empire as a combination of ignorance and ineptitude was unsound; that the Roman Empire—for such it was in every but the geographical aspect—was now gloriously vindicated.

It was a cry of dismay from my new friend that brought the lateness of the hour to my attention. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed as he looked at his watch. "Where can the day have gone? I am afraid Mrs. Hemingway will be direly annoyed. I had an appointment to meet her at the dentist's two hours ago, after which we were both to attend an important meeting of the Middlewest Housewives' Balanced Diet League, of which she is the newly elected president. I dare say I shall have some difficulty in persuading her that I have not been negligent."

"‘The missing man,’" I said cryptically, "‘was five feet eight inches in height, weighed one hundred and thirty-five pounds, walked with a slight stoop and was careless of dress.’"

The badgered yap regarded me with an appealing eye. "I see," said he, "you counsel me to an extreme course. But, really, one doesn't go to extremes."

"‘One’ does," I retorted, making a rather delicious play on words, "though another may pusillanimously draw back."

The poor bird still stared in feeble dismay at his watch, finally replacing it with a sigh. "You interest me strangely, Mr. Simms. You are, I may say, a character—a real type. I was visited not long since by a gentleman from Chicago who was making a study of types, and I wish he might have met you. I shall have to write him of our encounter, which he would have enjoyed tremendously had he been here. But meantime I must hurry on. Mrs. Hemingway's meeting, it is to be feared, will be over, but I can at least, I hope, have the marks of my carelessness erased from her car. And how about your own machine?"

"It is not my car," I replied; "merely one I was allowed to take for an errand which I now see I shall have no time to do. However, I am certain the lady will accept my explanation."

He again regarded me shrewdly, running his eyes over the lines of my mean attire. "If a few dollars," he began, reaching for a wallet, "would be of any service, I shall be glad indeed——" But I stopped him.

"Thank you," I said, "I have enough for my simple needs."

"I dare say," he replied, and stared wistfully at me. "In your way of life you demand little—a king's poverty is a beggar's competence."

"Remember the vacant house," I urged as we shook hands in farewell. "A few days there and you will have courage for the great release." Yet the man was timid and I had little hope he would ever nerve himself to the determination that had led me to smash my way coolly into another's home.

Returning to the camp ground I felt not a little foolish at having again forgotten Mrs. Gale's buttons and thread, yet I was sure when I told her of my way-side encounter with one of my own kind that she would forbear to joke me about it. Also I hoped that none of the supplies she had also requested had been needed for our evening meal.

And then as I, in this pleasant mood, entered the camp ground and brought the car to a halt in its accustomed nook, I heard raised voices and saw that my neighbor had suffered an intrusion.

CHAPTER XIII

I DROVE the car to its resting place at the side of Mrs. Gale's tent not uneventfully, for, having my curiosity aroused by two strangers I saw to be present, I grazed the already injured fender against a tree with rather noisy results that caused all eyes to be bent upon me. As I dismounted I heard an exclamation from one of these persons, an uncouth, sour-appearing individual in the careless attire of a land cultivator, and I noted that he and my hostess must have been at odds when I arrived. She still confronted the fellow with flashing eyes, her feet planted firmly wide, her arms akimbo and an expression of resolute antagonism clouding her capable face, though the visitor had turned to survey myself with a sort of hang-dog truculence.

The second stranger, a pleasant-seeming, nicely dressed lad in his late teens, stood a little apart regarding the two others with earnest and excited eyes, though he, also, directed his glance nervously upon me as I came forward. The high words had ceased on my appearance, but through the silence now ensuing I felt a sinister tension in the group. I felt I must have come upon a dispute of extreme bitterness and that the antagonists had been frozen at its very height.

Greatly embarrassed by my awkward situation and

by the odd stares the two men fastened upon me, I mumbled a word of apology and turned toward my own tent, meaning to withdraw from a scene where, obviously, I had no place. But not a dozen feet had I gone when I was stupefied by a snarl of muffled rage from the unkempt intruder.

"Aha! I knew there was another man. So that's the parlor snake that broke up my home!"

At these extraordinary words I turned and saw that the fellow had leveled an accusing finger full at me, while the young chap took a step forward, quivering with suppressed eagerness.

I stood helpless, at a loss for words to answer this silly accusation. Again the fellow repeated his curious phrase—"Parlor snake, that's all you are!"

Then while he glared at me until I felt the tension becoming unbearable I heard the cool, crisp tones of the woman.

"Nonsense, Judson Gale! You are the only man who bursted up your home, and full well you know it. It's too funny, the idea of poor Mr. Simms being what you call him! He is a very refined gentleman and is my house guest pure and simple."

"Ha! House guest!" cried my accuser. "Ha, ha!" he laughed again with a bitter, sneering inflection. "Yes, I already heard a lot about his kind of a house guest. Ha, ha! I should think I had. And him driving my car around hog-wild, jamming its fenders against every tree in the whole country."

This, of course, was the most outrageous exaggeration, and showed the speaker to be not himself. I was about to protest that I had done but trifling damage

to the car when prevented by the decisive voice of Mrs. Gale.

"That is not your car," she affirmed. "That car was bought with my own money, earned by my own hands, and if you dare to lay one little finger on it I'll call the police. Your car, as you call it, was such a wreck they wouldn't allow me but a hundred dollars when I traded it in two and a half years ago in the city of Pendleton, Oregon, as you can find out for yourself."

"That ain't neither here nor there," crudely responded the fellow. "What I want to know is, how you going to defend yourself now I've caught you with the very man that lured you off to an evil life?"

I felt myself blushing at the vile innuendo, and looked for the woman, though innocent as one of her own babes, to be overcome with confusion. What was my astonishment, then, to hear a merry peal of laughter ring from her lips!

"Ha, ha!" she laughed in a tone rich with scorn. "Very well, then, you penny-pincher, I'll tell you something; you go to Lawyer Benjamin B. Krause, in the Empire Block, in this very town, and you'll find out how I'm going to defend myself. You'll find out that I brought suit for divorce against you two weeks ago. I hope you go, for if you do I'll have my release quicker, because he can serve the injunction or something on you instead of waiting to publish it. That's what you'll find out. And anything you've got to say, say it to him. He's a good lawyer and well paid out of my own money, which I have saved nearly two thousand dollars of since I quit slaving for you without

pay. I'm telling you that just to make you suffer. Think of it, Jud—nearly two thousand dollars, and fifteen hundred of it drawing four per cent in a savings account! That's a bitter blow, ain't it?"

And the poor fish did stand aghast under these revelations. His features began to work violently and I saw he was about to explode in a new rage. Before he could utter a word, however, his wife was again speaking.

"Now, on your way!" she commanded, drawing herself to her full height. "If you create any more of this scandal here I shall resort to the extremest measures a lady is allowed to take in this state. Go get a lawyer of your own—but remember, they won't work for nothing, like I did the years I was your mere toy."

"Very well, then," retorted the husband hotly, "that's just what I will do. I guess two can go to law as well as one. I'll find out if a decent family man is obliged to stand idle and see his home wrecked by an unprincipled interloper. And also, my lady, I'll find out about that hundred dollars that was allowed you on my car. You practically stole that money from me."

"Ha, ha!" the woman again laughed in a careless manner. "And while you are doing all these great things, my own lawyer will be bringing suit against you for ten years' back pay you owe me for doing the labor of two men on your abandoned farm—that's what he'll do. I guess you don't know the laws of the state where I am now a legal resident. I guess you'll talk different when I get judgments against you amounting in all to a round sum of at least six or

seven thousand dollars that I can force you to disgorge."

"It's a lie; no state would do such a hellish thing!" cried the badgered man, though not, I could detect, with perfect conviction. He seemed, indeed, to be uneasy, and turned to leave in a slinking manner, with a parting threat that he would have his rights.

"Ha, ha, ha! I guess that made you back up all of a sudden," the woman called after him triumphantly. "And remember, I will meet you any time in friendship's name only, but if you come around here looking for trouble you'll be disgusted to find out how much there is."

During this disgraceful interchange of asperities I had noticed that the lad who must have accompanied the injured husband stood keenly attentive, and now he spoke as the other shambled off. "One moment, Mr. Gale. If you will wait in my car I'll run you back to town, but first I am going to ask this gentleman for a word or two." And to my astonishment the speaker indicated me.

I scarce knew what to reply, not relishing, as may readily be imagined, any attempt to draw me into a most regrettable controversy, but while I hesitated Mrs. Gale spoke to the boy.

"You will find Mr. Simms one of the most enlightened talkers you have ever listened to," said she. "And, Mr. Simms, this young man is a writer for the Daily Gazette who came here after listening to that insect's raving. I guess he now sees the honest truth of matters, but if you can help him any further, pray do." And with this the astonishing woman began in a quite

unconcerned manner to lay the table for our evening meal, not glancing again at either the young writer or me.

"If you will come to my own little place," I therefore said, "I shall be at your service. I dare say my hostess will like it as well if we withdraw." And together we proceeded to my tent, where I begged the chap to take my chair while I seated myself upon the felled tree and prepared to assist him in any way I could.

"Simms is the name, I believe," he remarked politely, at the same time producing a notebook and pencil. "And would you mind giving me your full name and address?"

"I am Addison Simms of Seattle, Washington," I willingly answered.

The boy, who had begun to write, glanced up at me in blank surprise and asked me to repeat my words, which I did.

"But I always thought that name was just a fake," he objected. "I thought it was just a character in an advertisement. I never dreamed there was really such a person."

So ingenuous was he I could not help smiling as I reassured him of my realness. "And you are a prominent member of the Seattle Rotary Club," he added.

I had always been baffled by the mention of this club in connection with the supposititious Simms, having intended to inquire at a suitable opportunity what a rotary club might be. The matter had escaped my mind, but I now saw that I would better acknowledge this eminence, so I replied in as casual a manner as

I could, "I am still a member of the club, though not as prominent as formerly. I have rather given up rotary work of late years and indeed I believe the interest in it is dying out generally, as it did in the parent organization, The League of American Wheelmen, of which I was also a member." It occurred to me that there must be a connection between these clubs.

The lad was now busily writing, but after a moment again glanced up to inquire, "And have you anything to say regarding your connection with this domestic upheaval, Mr. Simms?"

"Nothing of public interest," I said firmly. "I have for some weeks been a house guest of Mrs. Gale yonder—I need not say to you, my boy, merely a house guest. That fellow's innuendoes were, of course, palpably absurd."

"Innuendoes!" he repeated, smiling. "Palpably—absurd." Then after a moment, "You are married yourself, Mr. Simms?"

"Naturally," I replied; "though for some time now business affairs have kept me from my home."

"Ah, yes," he remarked, putting up his notebook and pencil as he rose. "That's all, I guess. At least I think I have everything. You see, Mr. Simms, this is the very first summer that I have embraced a career of journalism and I am trying terribly hard to make good. Now you take this unfortunate domestic clash—I want to handle it the right way, like the big metropolitan sheets would handle it, so I have tried to get in every detail, because to the reporter's keen eye it will be a scoop of a highly important scope and I would

hate to overlook anything. But I guess I have all the points of this unsavory triangle. So if you will excuse me I will now go and write up the account, or story as we reporters simply call it."

With this he politely bade me good evening, and my hostess, who watched him depart to the car where the bereft husband had waited, now summoned me in clear tones to the evening meal, at which I was amazed to note that she conducted herself with the utmost aplomb. The farmer, Gale, would not be without faults, I was certain, yet his whilom mate betrayed an unfeminine insensibility that fairly chilled me. More clearly than ever I saw that she and her kind were not least of the evils menacing America's home life. And she would be free to continue her insidious propaganda in the homes she was unsuspectingly permitted to enter—free to tell her sisters of the so-called way out. Suddenly I recalled Doctor Hemingway, regretting I had not thought to warn him of this pernicious influence likely at any moment to make itself felt in his own establishment, where the poor man, it was plain, had already sufficient to contend with.

"Well, that's over," announced Mrs. Gale quite cheerfully as I seated myself at her board. "That penny-pincher won't bother me again, except to get the hundred dollars I was allowed on his rattly old tin car. I'll pay him that just to be rid of him. It's dirt-cheap."

"You spoke," I said, "of a legal proceeding to compel him to reimburse you for your years of labor. Am I to understand the law really allows you to do this?"

"Probably not," she replied unconcernedly, "because

woman has not come into her full rights yet under man-made laws. I just happened to think of it in an inspiration, and anyhow it worked with Judson. He's scared stiff right now, and he'll never know any different because he's too stingy to pay a lawyer to find out. Once he had a lawyer in a damage suit and I had to pick sixteen crates of raspberries to pay the bill. Now he hasn't any plaything to be at his beck and call, and he'll keep away from lawyers—you see!"

It was on this night that our table was for the first time graced, at the meal's end, by finger bowls. The children, who had been secreted in the tent during their stricken father's visit, had all their eyes on me while I used mine, watching my procedure before somewhat self-consciously using their own. It was rather an ordeal.

The evening closed somewhat more quietly than usual, however, as I felt in no mood for discourse. Mrs. Gale did endeavor to draw me out regarding the early history of Egypt, but the topic soon languished. With her final declaration, "I am certainly going to some day witness all those fine pieces of antiquity over there," we said good night and I retired to my tent, suffering odd little twinges of a feeling I did not at first identify. I supposed it to be caused by the painful scene to which I had been an unwilling witness, and yet in a curious manner it involved the person of the newly met Doctor Hemingway.

To my amazement I presently realized that my encounter with the good chap had left me with a distinct nostalgia. Forgetting, as we are so prone to do, the annoying realities of an environment long since es-

caped, I found myself picturing its more gracious details, the ordered life, the physical ease, the agreeable labor, and a certain—at least public—deference which a man of my position had never failed to command. I had even envied the good doctor his decent clothing, although the collar of his coat had been untidy with dandruff. “Homesick” seemed too strong a term, yet I was ill at ease. I reflected, too, that the unscrupulous Mrs. Gale would be but one of a numerous type. Others seething with the same red propaganda might even now be poisoning the domestic atmosphere of Fairwater. Nay, my own home might have suffered. Did I not know Mrs. Copplestone to be all too susceptible; to be as avid for the merely new as ever St. Paul found the Athenians?

A night’s sound rest, however, brought me out of this humiliating despondency, and I was restored to my native buoyance by the time I had partaken of breakfast.

Now I renewed my plan to visit the lively carnival, having in mind the rare anthropological specimen from the lowlands of Madagascar, but even more vividly that beautiful large woman, the Hamburger Queen, whose opulent personality had so arrested me on another day. Yet when I suggested to Mrs. Gale that I be permitted to go to town, making as an excuse that I had utterly and quite inexplicably forgotten her errands on my last trip, I found her firm to perform this service for herself. She was not unamiable, but she stated—indeed with some shadow of justice—that I had twice gone for her materials and twice returned without them, and she could not chance another fruit-

less trip. Saying I might go another time when things less urgent were needed, she drove off by herself, with a complacency, I thought, just a bit overdone—as if a woman might not, by sheer virtue of her sex, forget something now and again.

Left alone I tried to interest myself in one of the magazines of Mrs. Gale, which I humorously noted had been chosen with a fine inconsistency, for, excepting a few tales of the most improving fiction in which I could not discover that one character did anything criminal or even blameworthy, it was devoted to the management of children in health and in sickness, the preparation of food, the wardrobe of the housewife, the etiquette of social functions—The Home—which this woman was doing her utmost to wipe out. Beyond this anomaly, however—that such a woman should have found such a magazine anything but an irritation—I discovered little of interest in its columns, though it seemed to me that to home keepers as yet uncorrupted it might prove exhilarating.

Inevitably, then, I found myself reverting to the little drama of the night before. Though it had been painful at the time, morning had brought me a corrected perspective, and now I found it a little absurd; and especially absurd that I should have felt dismay over a possible public misconstruction of my own innocent part in it. That, I saw, would be preposterous. I regretted, however, that I had found no opportunity, or had lacked the presence of mind to insist that the husband himself should have been made to see the rank unreasonableness of his accusation against me. A few calm words, I doubted not, would have convinced him

of his error and would have secured from him a handsome apology.

Idly I mused upon his violence of manner and his ill-chosen words. He had called me a parlor snake, and the term puzzled me. At present I could but blindly surmise. I had read that in India certain non-poisonous snakes are kept about for their value in destroying other vermin, but this left me still perplexed, since such a reptile would be of service, and the enraged man had meant his term to be opprobrious. Some day, I resolved, I should learn the current meaning of the epithet—for such it must be—from Sooner Jackson, who specialized so brilliantly in the rural vulgate.

While I meditated thus, Mrs. Gale drove in, and I observed even as she alighted from her car that she wore an expression of pleased vivacity. Hastening to the table where I sat, and flourishing a newspaper, she cried in delighted tones, "Well, I must say, Mr. Simms, that young writer last night has a wonderful command of language, and yet he seemed just a big boy. It's all here"—again she flourished the paper—"and you will be glad to know that my lady customer I'm working for had read it, and two of her lady friends that were there had read it, too, and both gave me orders for work. It just shows how publicity helps a woman when she's doing the best she can and everyone knows her husband was to blame."

"I am delighted," I said, "to know that the lad acquitted himself so well. True, he is but a stripling, yet I remarked his earnestness. He is trying to make good, as the saying is, and I for one rejoice to hear it;

but perhaps you will let me read the effort of this journalistic tyro."

"Why, of course!" she smiled. "I knew you'd be interested."

Forthwith she spread the sheet before me and stood back while my eyes rapidly scanned a wide headline stretching across three of the columns. I may say now that I first read it in a curious daze, serenely oblivious that the awful words could in any remotest way concern my actual self. Not until a second, a third, a fourth bewildered perusal did I begin to shudder with a sense of their enormity.

"Addison Simms, Widely Known Rotarian, Goes Out of His Home for Love—Injured Husband Threatens Heart-Balm Suit." Thus succinctly was the monstrous calumny summarized, and while the unaccountable Mrs. Gale stood by, rather elated and from time to time emitting a sort of hysterical giggle, I went on to the infamous libel that followed.

"At six o'clock last evening Judson M. Gale, a careworn farmer of middle age from Oregon, stood before his erring spouse at the free auto-camp grounds east of town, pleading in a sob-riven voice that she return to him and the cozy little home she had deserted on a certain August morning three years ago. Confronting this anguished figure, the woman—a warmly tinted blonde of striking beauty, clad in a simple gown of some soft, clinging stuff that set off her attractive physique—with unruffled demeanor calmly declared her intention of continuing in the way she had chosen—the 'Easiest Way,' one almost heard her mutter.

"Enter 'The Other Man.'"

“While the little drama of palpitating heart-throbs moved on with the relentlessness of fate itself, a car was heard to noisily approach, and on this striking scene appeared still another man, to the casual observer of the Judson Gale type, but in reality far different. He is not the conventional roué as the silver screen depicts them, not a man of striking physique, charm of manner or that indefinable *je ne sais pas* that has led many a true wife to forget the most sacred of all vows made at the altar. Beholding this second man the casual observer would exclaim, ‘What did this gently bred woman of culture and refinement and a flowerlike beauty see in such a commonplace-looking roué that would lead her, as alleged, to forsake one solemnly sworn to cherish and protect her?’

“For the intruder, the serpent in that Eden, was none other than Addison Simms, widely known in our periodical press as a Rotarian and prosperous business man of the city of Seattle. This much the man admitted in an interview accorded a Gazette reporter. Then, though denying the charge of the alleged injured husband, he further admitted that he had for some weeks been the ‘house guest’ of the erring woman—‘merely’ a house guest, he explained with a cynical lightness of manner, adding with a mocking laugh that he had a wife and family from which ‘business’ was now keeping him. Although roughly attired and evidently careless of his appearance Addison Simms yet betrays traces of a former refinement; but the pace has told, and one seeks in vain for even a hint of the sinister power over good women which, it is alleged, enabled him to lay in ruins the humble home of Judson Gale.

"At sight of his alleged betrayer the anguish of the stricken husband turned to gall, and after a dramatic denunciation of Simms which evoked a stinging denial only from the Rotarian's alleged love-mate, he turned despairingly and stumbled out into the silence of the night, there to be alone with his grief under the kindly stars. Later, to the Gazette man he disclosed his intention of seeking legal advice, though admitting that his limited means would doubtless hamper him in any contest with his now prosperous wife. Thus simply the curtain rang down on a drama of heart-throbs in which an alleged infatuated pair remained deaf to the appeal of a broken man who had seen the sanctity of his home violated. It was the old sordid story of man's perfidy and woman's alleged weakness.

"Will there be other acts to the drama? Will the injured husband find his way back to a bleak fireside while the alleged guilty pair continue to sustain their admitted relations of hostess and 'house guest'—or will the desperate man bring about in the wooded vales of our free auto-camp grounds one of those tragic scenes of vengeance we have so long been accustomed to in the daily press?

"Meantime, what did this woman of striking personal appearance and obvious refinement see attractive in plain, dull, elderly Addison Simms? And you, Mr. Addison Simms, outwardly so little the Don Juan, Gazette readers would like to know the precise nature of the 'business' which has banished you from your own wife and fireside and detained you so long in our fair city as 'merely' a house guest."

The lying sheet fell from my nerveless hands, which I could feel had grown damp as I read. "But this is infamous!" I cried, and looked up to find Mrs. Gale scanning her face in the mirror that hung on a tree. To my amazement she turned to me with an expression of pure delight.

"Did you see what he said about me?" she eagerly demanded. "About my physique and my striking beauty, and all that?" And she went back to the glass, rising to her tiptoes for a better survey of her person.

"But did you see what he says about me?" I hotly cried. The woman's indifference to my plight had become insufferable.

"He was kind of pernickety about you," she conceded, shifting her head so that the face might be observed from varying angles.

"Pernickety!" I sneered, recalling the odious phrases which this double-tongued reprobate had so wilfully penned.

I doubt if the woman heard me, as she now turned about and, in a posing attitude with her eyes cast down, asked, "Do you think I am demure, Mr. Simms? A certain gentleman once told me so, but I thought he was just trying to create agreeable conversation. And now this writer says my beauty is flowerlike and I have obvious refinement. Of course it may be only newspaper talk. Anyway, I have always made friends easily. I think I have cultivated my personality since I didn't have to perform so many farm chores—butchering and milking and fence-building, and all like that."

I saw that I must speak firmly if I would break the spell which had been put upon this amazing creature. "Madam," I said in a tone of sternness that at last roused her from the doting analysis of her own charms, "are you aware that this scandalmonger has placed me in an impossible position? What, tell me, am I to do to escape this undeserved odium?"

The woman lightly shrugged her shoulders, a gesture fairly blooming with indifference to all but her own unenviable eminence. "But you, Mr. Simms, are a public character. I never guessed you were the famous Addison Simms because Doctor Jackson addressed you as Al. And of course, being a public man, you are a target for this sort of notice. I shouldn't wonder if that writer for the paper will be back here after your photograph. And that reminds me! I must open up the trunk and get out one of mine. I've got a good one in a party gown, looking down at a bunch of lilies. As for that mean old Judson Gale, if he comes here again I'll put a bee on him. It won't be refined, but I'm just hurting to do it."

While the creature rattled on I suddenly saw that I must confide the truth to her. "Mrs. Gale," I said, holding her wandering regard with a raised hand, "I am not Addison Simms at all, and this adds to my embarrassment. I was led to assume the name by a series of inadvertences and misunderstandings. And what, I ask you, will the real Mr. Simms think when he learns, as he probably will, that one falsely pretending to be himself has brought public odium upon the name? I suppose there are legal proceedings he could take against me."

I had at last, I was glad to see, secured the woman's attention and brought her to some fitting consideration of my plight.

"Well, well!" she exclaimed in a pleasantly excited manner. "So you have been leading a double life? And what is your right name?" She hung waiting for my response, and I was obliged to think quickly.

"Hector Montague," I said; adding to myself, "A character in fiction, better known to the police of two continents as The Fox." And a true fox I would be, I resolved, from now on, not only with this woman but with others who might seek to complicate my peaceful life.

"Hector Montague!" she repeated. "There, isn't that a nice-sounding name? And so romantic! Do you know, I always thought you must have had a romance in your dull life."

"Nothing I care to speak of," I said coldly.

"Oh, I can realize that—though of course any little thing you ever did want to tell me, Mr. Montague, would be sacredly guarded. I can seal my lips if advisable."

"I am certain of that," I said, "but in relation to my own private life there will be no occasion for restraint."

"Oh, very well," she replied, tartly, I thought. But she warmed almost at once, saying, "And I haven't told you the best thing of all. When I took that lady that lives in the yellow brick house's dress to her this morning I met she and her husband and these other two ladies dropped in and were all interested in my romantic life story and wanted to know some more

details and I got these other two orders, and I'm going back at once and meet some of these parties' other friends because I suggested that I would like to give a scramble supper here this evening just to a few ladies, thinking I'd have a chance to make myself better known; and they accepted."

"A scramble supper?" I demanded. "Do you mean you would dare venture on a social affair with this atrocious scandal still a stench in the public nostrils?"

"Pooh!" said the woman. "Mr. Montague, that isn't the most refined possible way to speak of this notice I had in the paper, either. When I got the idea this morning I said to myself, 'Pooh! they will be glad to come!' and so they were. But don't suppose that I forgot about you. That was one of the reasons—I wanted a few of these thinking clubwomen to meet you, so they could see I had lived my past life like a lady."

Shocked as I was at these words I did not forget that Hector Montague had been known as The Fox. "I hardly see," I objected, "how I could clear your reputation of the foul aspersion put upon it by that young degenerate of last night."

"Why, Mr. Montague!" she glibly explained. "Of course it's kind of a delicate thing to bring out in conversation, but whatever you may have been in the dear, dead past, you cannot be said now to have a magnetic personality. That's why I invited these ladies to a scramble supper to meet you. 'Pooh!' I says to myself, 'the moment these ladies see him they will know there could never have been anything of a light or scandalous nature between him and I.' And

of course when they hear you talking about historical facts, and Egypt, and so forth, they will see your mind is above such frivolity anyway, being on the bigger and better things of life like it ought to be when one reaches your age. No one in their right mind would be very likely to think of you as a love-mate."

This speech, in the most execrable bad taste, had made me feel all wriggly inside—I can find no other word for it—but I knew I must not betray irritation. "I am certain," I said, "that your reasoning is sound." But I reflected that I, too, could say "Pooh!" to myself, and I at once indulged in this novel thought device, knowing full well that I positively would not attend this detestable scramble supper.

Mrs. Gale completed her preparations for another trip to the town, and as she did so my plan was formed. Once again I would be missed from a social affair I had been expected to grace. When all was ready I remarked casually that I believed I would accompany my hostess as far as the tented city of the carnival, and entered the car with her. It was only now that she bethought herself of a letter for me which she had put in her shopping bag. I saw it to be from Sooner, and placed it in a pocket for future reading.

Before the gay row of canvas at the town's edge I was set down, the besotted woman remarking that she would pick me up on her return. "I mustn't forget the olives and the doilies," was her last silly speech.

How little she suspected that long ere her frightful business was finished I should be well on my way, unhampered at last, to view the famed Rocky Mountains!

CHAPTER XIV

A MOMENT later I gazed on the spirited portrait of the wild man. Inside, a bass drum was being rapidly beaten, and I listened to the announcer tell without variation the dramatic tale of the capture, pausing expectantly, as before, at its conclusion with hand to ear, while the drum ceased its stirring measure and there came sounds of ferocious growling with the ominous rattle of chains. All at once I wondered if this outbreak were opportune or merely a prearranged device to assist the selling talk. At any rate I might view the monstrosity for myself, since the expense was trifling.

"Only ten cents, good people," the chap was saying. "And remember, ten cents, a dime, the tenth part of a dollar, will neither make, nor break, nor set a man up in business." He made it seem so reasonable that I hesitated no longer but gave him the bill I had procured from Mrs. Gale the day before, receiving a vast quantity of silver in return, and passed within the inclosure.

The wild man was, at first sight, indeed a fearsome object, heavily haired and with loathsome features, his naturally dark skin being painted with gaudy designs in color. He growled again as I entered with others and, brandishing a knotted club, engaged in a war dance on the raised platform which he occupied,

accompanying this by a series of grunting noises in rhythm not wholly unlike my own medicine song of the Ugwalallas. I saw, too, that the creature had been chained to one of the tent supports, though released for the dance, probably by the young man who performed upon the bass drum and who now left his instrument as the dance was concluded, saying "Here you are, people, regard him closely: Moowoo, the wild man from the lowlands of Madagascar. Step forward, though do not annoy him, as when annoyed his rage is uncontrollable. I believe he has a few of his photographs which he will part with for a dime if properly approached."

Upon this the speaker went back to his drum, which he began beating with gusto while those who had entered with me crowded about the wild man and some of them purchased his photograph, of which he had a row standing in front of the folding chair he occupied. I observed that, although he spoke in an unknown and fiercely explosive tongue, he made change accurately in disposing of his portraits. I detected further that, when sitting, he was not of the gigantic stature shown on the banner outside. He was not huge, nor especially muscular, as was revealed by the skin-tight brown suit that covered him; a closer scrutiny convinced me that his eyes were the Nordic blue and that his features were, basically, not of a terrifying aspect, this effect being achieved by a cunning use of the paints that bedizened him. Frankly I could not imagine him ever to have gnawed a human thigh bone, no matter what his captors, a band of our jolly jack tars, might have said. His jaw was not prognathous,

his forehead did not retreat, and his nose was of a mild Caucasian pattern.

Rather impatient with myself for having wasted time and money here, I passed out, stopping to remark to the announcer, who bent down to me from his rostrum, "I very much doubt that fellow's being dangerously wild."

He must have misunderstood me, however, for he straightened up and in a clear, ringing voice, shouted, "That's what they all say—the best show on the lot!" I did not trouble to correct him, but walked on, being sure that the anatomical paradox in the next inclosure would prove equally disappointing.

Presently then I came before the booth of the Hamburger Queen and rejoiced that here, at least, one could profitably pause. The woman was as lovely as I had first thought her, a vast Hebe, her noble contours superbly modeled, and I was newly struck with her serenity, her lifted aloofness from the sordid routine that engaged her. Calm-eyed, deliberate, unruffled by the clamor of patrons who devoured her wares at the counter, she ministered to their wants with an unhurried deftness that made me delight in her movements.

Determined to study this entrancing creature more nearly, I took a place at the board. Without once regarding me she yet, as she put her food before me, conveyed an impression of the finest courtesy. She moved with automatic sureness, her eyes ever along the line of her patrons to forestall their needs. The eyes, I saw, were gray as I had supposed, yet there was a faintly warming hint of blue in the color, and

they were shaded by the blackest and longest of lashes. She was all in white, with a white cap at a jaunty angle that left much of her fair hair revealed.

I ate her hamburger steak slowly to prolong my opportunity of observing the woman. I even demanded onions and mustard extra, though I care for neither. Many of her patrons departed presently, after receiving her cheerful thank you for their payments, and I had an opportunity to study her in repose. With regal detached calm she surveyed the crowd as it passed or loitered before adjacent booths.

"They make me laugh," she murmured. "What's it all for?"

I saw she had not consciously addressed the words to me or to anyone. She was beholding humans distantly and tolerantly, as might a goddess; she communicated with herself. A group of giggling school misses passed, all in the mode of bobbed hair, as it is called. Her eyes lingered on them.

"Funny fuzz-headed hussies!" she exclaimed. "Shaving the back of their necks." A moment later she was regarding two women of mature years with pale gold hair, lavishly dressed, and with faces, even to my eye, heavily overlaid and opaque with tinted cosmetics. "Funny," she again muttered. "Funny, funny! So many ladies look like they ain't."

Her placid gaze then rested upon a man and wife, each leading a child by the hand and carrying on a violent dispute of some domestic character, whereupon she called, though softly, "That's right, sister—keep the home fights burning!" Presently she repeated her first comment—"Funny, funny! What's it all for?"

But then, when I would have relished more of her quaint speech, she was called to take the money of a man who had eaten. I watched her receive a bill and go to her till on a rear shelf, then turn back with a faintly shadowed frown clouding her noble brow.

"The smallest you've got?" she demanded of her patron, a farm youth.

"It's all I got," replied he. Her frown deepened. Almost she had become human.

I thought quickly. "I have a large wad of dough in small silver, madam," I said, "if I can be of service."

"Change a five?" she asked, and delightedly I counted out the change. "I secured it," I explained, "when I visited Moowoo, the Madagascar wild man two doors away, though I doubt if he is as wild now as when his portrait was painted."

"I've seen 'em wilder," she absently admitted as she took the change and completed the business with her patron. Then, I being the sole person remaining at her counter, she returned to me, the marble of her brow again creased to a frown as she glanced at a watch that appeared tiny indeed on the splendid pale expanse of her wrist.

"An hour and a half! What do you think of that? I sent that chore boy with a ten-spot to get small silver an hour and a half ago. And it's taken me all this time to get wise. I've been gypped [made impatient] in broad daylight. Well, well, well! And me a wise old owl!" She shrugged her great shoulders and added more cheerfully, "Well, even a monkey falls out of a tree now and then."

"I am afraid I do not quite understand," I ventured,

whereupon the woman patiently made it clear to me that the employee she had sent with the bank note to be changed must have been untrustworthy, since it was plain he had decamped with her money.

"The scamp!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"It was certainly soft sugar for that buttercup," she returned. "Wouldn't I like to swing once at him [overtake him]! He'd light like an egg. Him and his petty-larceny sketch! But he's put me on the other end of the laugh this time, me here without help and a flock of hungry eggs [bums] likely to come along any minute."

I now finished my simple meal and said, "If I can be of the slightest help in your predicament, madam, pray command me. I am not pressed for time and any service I can render will be a real pleasure to me as well."

The woman regarded me closely, I think for the first time. "Why, hello, Jasper! When did you ooze in? Are you a trouper?"

"I am not," I replied. "I have never done military service. My name is Montague, Hector Montague, and I am merely on my way to view the famed Rocky Mountains. I have long wished to behold them, but always until now something has intervened."

She fastened her look of calm appraisal upon me and I saw a clear light of understanding in her beautiful eyes. "You have a wonderful string of chatter," she said. "At first I thought you were some swell kidder [a fashionable hick] but I see you're not. Hector Montague, eh? You don't quite put that over—you ain't up in the lines yet; you're still winging the

part—but you're on the level, Jasper, and you certainly are the surprise hit of the show to me. Did you mean that about helping me out here—just till one of the boys gets off duty?"

"I can only repeat," I said, "that it will give me great pleasure to serve you, though I ought to confess that I have never been thought a practical sort. Perhaps, though, your work will not be too involved."

"Well, if you aren't the words and music!" she exclaimed.

"I am only a poor sap," I continued, "but if a really bone-headed sincerity in wishing to rescue you from your present difficulty will be of any help——"

A slight bewilderment seemed to film the clear gaze, but her manner became brisk. "Listen, then: Go round back and you'll find a pail. It ain't at all involved, and straight across the lot you'll find a hydrant. Bring me a pail of water and see if you can beat the time that ornery defaulter made. He was always slow; any time he started for water a couple of snails would tear by him. Quick now—here comes a sailor!"

A patron had indeed halted at the other end of the counter and was calling for food, though I could observe nothing in his dress or manner to indicate that he followed the sea for a livelihood. But I remembered the injunction to hurry, and lost no time in finding the pail, which I filled with water as directed. The Hamburger Queen, again preoccupied with her tasks, merely nodded her approval when I returned, and presently in a sort of kitchen inclosure at the back of the booth she directed me to other simple works which I had no difficulty in managing. Among these were the slicing of

bread—she had now, after cautioning me to wash my hands thoroughly, attired me in a spotless white apron—the placing of cubes of butter on tiny plates, the replenishing of the extra mustard and onions, and the fetching to her of molded hamburger cakes, of which she kept a supply sizzling on the griddled top of her oilstove at the front, and the fragrance of which must have enticed many a patron to her counter.

Once, also, to my delight, I was permitted to fill the magazine of her stove with a supply of oil, after telling her that I well knew the mechanism of these contrivances. Needless to say, I did the work without mishap, this being a modern stove of simple construction. Had the Leffingwells, I reflected, not been content with an absurdly outmoded kitchen equipment, it would have been far better for them. Undoubtedly in these matters it is true economy not to play the niggard.

While I busied myself at these simple occupations the afternoon wore to its close. Nor was I at a loss for opportunities to fraternize with the remarkable woman whom I now found it my pleasure to help. Her Olympian aloofness, no less than her unconsciousness of an overwhelming worth as a mere spectacle, never failed to charm me, while the things she would dryly say in fun, as if to herself, were constantly refreshing, even if I could not always appraise their precise significance. Once, for a specimen, when I took her a huge platter of what she called the gurried meat, she brought her gaze back from the far distance and briefly recognized me with the baffling words, “Now, who ever sold you down the river?”

I knew that some laughing response would be fit,

so I quickly said, "But, jesting apart, do you not find that Iowa skins superbly?"

I doubt, however, if she heard me, for almost at once her gaze was again distinctly fixed, and presently she demanded, "On the level, boy, am I as fleshy as that townner out there?"

I saw her to indicate an extremely stout woman who had paused before the wild man's banner, and was able to reassure her. "You are not," I earnestly declared. "That poor woman is unsightly while you would delight the eye of a sculptor."

At this she regarded me with a shrewd smile and demanded, "Where's Max?" adding, before I could answer that I knew no one of this name, "At that, I was getting by with art poses not so long since—oh, not so long!" And with rather a conscious movement she raised one beautiful hand aloft to secure a vagrant strand of hair beneath the cap she wore.

"I am sure that you must have got very far by them," I replied warmly.

"Where's Max?" she again demanded with a sharp look at me, and again before I could say that this person was unknown to me, she, with a characteristic swift change of manner, disclosed that she was dog-tired and would like to hit the good old hay [sit down a moment]. "Work," she added, "is an outrage that there can be such a thing as a plenty of."

"You really have a gift for laconic apothegm," I applauded.

She studied me sharply again, then declared, "I wouldn't take that from anyone but you, Jasper. It sounds like something a young girl shouldn't know."

I saw that she considered me to have been indiscreet, and was hastening to assure her of the innocence of my words, but observing that patrons approached she shut me off with "Ramp on, ramp on, you sheik! Here comes a flock of eggs [sailors]."

It will be seen that the Hamburger Queen must have been at times incomprehensible even to one who had gained no mean mastery of the underworld argot.

I had not forgotten the threat of Mrs. Gale to pick me up on her return from town, and from this moment I took care to show myself at the front of the booth as seldom as possible, for it was still my fixed resolve not to attend the unspeakable scramble supper. In pursuance of this design I remained closely within the kitchen apartment at the rear of the booth, finding one task or another that might plausibly keep me there, or even sitting quietly on one of the folding chairs, my mind at ease amid the loud disharmonies from without—the strident voices of announcers, the beating of drums, an almost incessant fusillade from a near-by shooting gallery, the strains of a hurdy-gurdy, the constant squawks of penny wind instruments carried by children—a multitudinous cacophony, always discordant and yet somehow thrilling.

As I floated in pleasant abstraction on this surging tide, my eyes shut, my body relaxed, I became suddenly aware of another presence and was alarmed to see well within the inclosure none other than Moowoo, the wild man from the Madagascar lowlands. My first thought was that the fellow had broken his manacles and been drawn to this spot by the scent of raw meat, of which an immense mass was on a stand at my back, and I

resolved that, whatever his prowess, I would to my utmost protect the property of my employer. There were sharp, long-bladed knives at hand! But almost at his entrance the Hamburger Queen appeared from the front of the booth, and I was amazed to hear the creature address her.

"Hello, momma! My neuritis has been getting me something fierce," he said in excellent English or at least without a trace of his native barbaric accent.

Instantly the woman was all sympathy. "Poor poppa!" she murmured; adding, "That tent gets like an oven and overheats you, then you cool off too quick, and no wonder the old pain stings you. How about a cup of tea and a good hot feed?"

The fellow nodded a consent, and she quickly lighted another small stove and placed a teakettle over the blaze. "But no heavy food," he objected. "No tea. Just half a slice of dry toast and the white of one egg in some milk."

I had risen and stood back at the beginning of the colloquy. The Hamburger Queen, now observing me, said "Meet the husband, Jas"; and to the wild man, who had dropped into my chair, "Stanley, this is a very nice old gentleman that happened along and helped me out this afternoon. I don't know what I'd have done without him. Wait till I tell you."

"Pleased to meet you," said the wild man, not rising, and I bowed in some embarrassment.

"Wait till I tell you, poppa," she continued. "That new chore boy has been out of the program since eleven o'clock this A.M. Do you know what—I give him a ten-spot to get me some small change, and he flew the

coop with it. And only last night he got his week's pay!"

"Maybe he was stuck up for it by some strong-arm," suggested the wild man. "There's plenty of the lads about, sticking up [accosting] folks right and left. I wouldn't like to go out myself if it was dark, not with any sized roll."

"But this was broad daylight, and he could have got his change at any concession within a hundred yards of here. No; your little old Irene was the one stuck up. Wouldn't I like to have one wallop at the cheap crook!" She sighed tremendously and added, "So many things should be that ain't."

We were now joined by the youth who had performed on the bass drum in the wild man's tent, and the Hamburger Queen addressed him. "Roswell, you'll have to go tend shop while I fix Stanley up and get a bite for myself. There's some gurru already cooking."

He left without a word and after pouring hot water into a teapot she prepared the white of an egg for her incredible husband. That is, I found him incredible as a wild man, sensitive to drafts, afflicted with neuritis, equal to but the white of one egg as food, and timorous about venturing out at night. Of course I was by this time convinced that he merely masqueraded in the part. He seemed a mild-mannered chap, worthy, I did not doubt, yet I wondered how this stupendous and epic creature had come to choose him for a mate.

They were presently at table with their food, the woman accompanying her tea with toast, and she now invited me to sit at the simple meal, which I did. Immediately she began to praise me to her husband.

"Stan, I want you to get this boy. He's a big-time single turn [a capable assistant] if I ever saw one."

"You doing a Rube act?" demanded the fellow of me.

"That remains for your good wife to say," I replied. "I believe I have rendered her real assistance, however, by fetching water as required and performing certain minor but not unimportant tasks incident to her business enterprise."

"What did I tell you?" demanded the woman of her plainly startled husband. "Stick around and catch his act," she urged. "He has a line of sure-fire chatter. Say! He's old Daniel Q. Webster himself in a Tad make-up. He wrote his book and still has a million words left over. Just put him before an art drop in one and let him ad-lib with maybe a pigeon finish, or a flag finish. Why, he'd take the house with a rush at any spot on the bill, mark my words. He's a Class-A press agent for me too. You ought to get some of the three-sheets he's been putting up. I ain't had to hear a pan about myself since he's been on the lot. I'll program his name any old time, believe me!"

I had become somewhat embarrassed by this tirade, which I detected to be a sort of scoffing and yet with a genuine heartiness at bottom. Undeniably I had impressed this majestic creature.

"Don't let her have your goat," her husband now cordially urged. "She thinks she's old Mr. Kidder's only child."

"I dare say we understand each other," I replied. "I haven't studied the ways of the underworld for nothing. I may not always be an acute egg, but I am sap

enough to know when I meet another sap such as your wife is."

"Bingo!" cried the woman at this, and with her clenched fist smote herself just beneath one ear. Then, to her husband, "Didn't I tell you he ought to be getting top money?"

"The biter bit," he returned, laughing loudly, "and serves her right!"

Hereupon the woman became her serious, worthy self. "All the same," she said, "the old boy looks like he'd been picking losers all this season, so if he wants to stick on and help me with the work, I'll sign him up. How about it, Jas? Fifteen berries a week and cakes?"

"Maybe it was drink put him bad," interposed the husband before I could reply.

"Ain't that like men!" retorted his wife. "That's the first thing they think of. Well, it wasn't drink and it wasn't dope, I can tell you that much," she stoutly affirmed in my defense. "And whatever it was, it wasn't anything he'd have cause to be ashamed of. I may be a poor working girl, but I am also some nut candler if anyone should ask you, Mr. Stanley G. Wisenheimer. This is a lovely old gentleman of good habits and no prison record. So how about it, Jas?" she concluded to me.

"As I explained this morning," I said, "I have formed the intention of viewing the famed Rocky Mountains and was on my way even when I loitered at your place. However, the mountains will be there for many years to come, and I confess I am attracted by your offer, with its wholesome diet of fruit and cakes. My only fear is that you may find me incompetent. I have had

little training in work of this sort and I do not doubt I should require almost constant supervision."

"Almost constantly you will get that same," replied the woman cordially, "so now we bill ourselves as a refined comedy duo and go out after the laughs with our neat hokum skit consisting of fried gurry, mustard and onions extra. What ho! Old teammate, I bet we stand them up."

"The surest thing you may know, Mrs. Wisenheimer," I agreed; whereat her husband laughed loud and she herself cried "Police! Police!" in shrill accents, though I saw her alarm to be feigned.

"Serves me right," she remarked. "I was overplaying my encore. Now you, poppa, you go make a strip change into something warm. Roswell has simply got to do your stuff tonight. I am not going to pay any more doctor's bills for that lame wing of yours."

With these firm words, accompanied by a tender patting of the fellow's shoulder, who meekly arose at her bidding, she returned to her difficult work at the front of the booth, saying half to herself as she went, "Exit limping!"

Stanley G. Wisenheimer, divested of his alarming embellishments, as I beheld him half an hour later, proved to be wholly unimpressive and I wondered why it should have been thought he could play so important a rôle. He was not only slight of build but with an unassuming manner and a kindly, rather intelligent face lacking any boldness of feature. The youth, Roswell, who, I learned, was a brother of the Hamburger Queen and who presently appeared in the wild man's scanty attire, savage-appearing wig and paint em-

bellishments, was much his superior in potential ferocity.

This chap, eating a simple meal in our kitchen, was joined by our announcer, Jim, or James, who, to my surprise, proved to be a second brother of the lady. And yet the husband had distinctly told me that Mrs. Wisenheimer, née Kidder, believed herself to be an only child. The puzzle did not long engage me, however, for the evening trade was on and I found abundant occupation under the kindly superintendence of my new employer.

Throughout the evening I was aware of being stimulated at my tasks by the almost constant beating of the big drum. It is an instrument I have always highly regarded, and indeed at times in my former life I had even been conscious of a longing to perform on one. This, to be sure, would not have been a seemly diversion for one in my then position. The longing, however, now came again upon me. It was presumptuous, I thought, and yet I wondered if by strict attention to my present simple tasks I might not win the confidence of these good people and perhaps be intrusted with more difficult work. Intuitively I felt that I could, as well as another, arouse the virile resonance of this noble instrument. But of course I must not expect an immediate promotion. I must prove my merit in humbler capacities.

Not until a later hour of the evening did I learn that we were to go on without delay to our next town. This delighted me, for I would then be removed from an embarrassing proximity to the impossible Mrs. Gale, and I fell to with a will when word was given by Stanley to

dismantle our juice joint and the tent of Moowoo. James the barker—who was indeed somewhat doggish in his dress—Roswell, Stanley, and Irene herself assisted in this labor, storing the equipment in two great motor vans at the rear.

One of these was a truly fascinating vehicle, its sides gayly lettered with The Hamburger Queen and its interior arranged something after the fashion of the Pullman palace sleeping-car in which I had made my journey to New York City, having berths on either side and a delightful series of household devices. The other van was bare inside and used for the transportation of the canvas and kitchen gear.

My assistance was acceptably rendered except for one fleeting inadvertence. Standing back idle, I noticed the bass drum and determined to use my brief leisure in testing out my skill on it. Retiring with the drum and its beater to a little distance where my practice would not annoy, I began very softly to attempt a combination of rhythms, and rejoiced to feel that I had guessed rightly. With a bit of application I made sure that my drumming could not be told from that of Roswell's or even from Stanley's, who had for that evening exchanged rôles with the boy.

While thus engaged I heard my name loudly called and rushed back to the work, meaning to snatch another few moments for the majestic instrument after a while. Our stuff was now mostly packed in the vans and I was shown in the larger one a nook between two heaps of canvas where I might make myself a comfortable couch if I chose, sleeping on my journey as do the Pullman travelers. While I examined the place and

arranged the blankets pointed out to me by Roswell, I heard James inquire in an impatient tone, "Where in Goshen is that bass drum? Who's seen the big noise?"

"I had it but a moment ago," I quickly answered. "I took it and its beater out there a little distance to ascertain if by chance I might not have a natural talent for the instrument."

"All right, all right! But out where?" demanded the still impatient fellow.

Then to my embarrassment I saw that I was at a loss. The darkness all around was made confusing by reason of the moving headlights of other motors and I had, quite excusably, lost my sense of direction. It might, I thought, have happened even to James himself. "I can only remember," I said, "that I left the large noise close by another van."

But while I stood thus trying to recall the scene, James saw fit to acquaint the others with my plight.

"Step up, step up, good people!" he called in his rather flowery oratorical manner, and as Stanley, Roswell and Irene, as well as half a dozen other too easily amused bums from neighboring concessions gathered about us, he continued, "I present to your notice free and without price, the only man on God's green earth that ever lost a bass drum in the level state of Iowa. It is true," he went on in his florid coarseness, "one John J. Glue, a Chinese juggler, did temporarily mislay a bass drum in the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky in the fall of 1874, but he was blindfolded at the time, and this living marvel before you——"

"Quit the rough stuff, Jim," cried my friend Irene. "He didn't eat it, did you, Jas?"

"Indeed I did not," I answered, relieved from my embarrassment by this laughable suggestion, "and well your brother, Mr. James G. Kidder, knows I didn't."

"Take that, you black rascal!" cried Irene to the fellow, "and look around. It can't be far." So we all searched the outlying ground and, surely enough, the thing was presently discovered by James himself, which, I thought, served him right for his ill-timed chaffing.

Now we were soon aboard, and rather than sleep away the journey I chose to sit by Stanley as he drove the car containing my employer and Roswell, James following alone with the larger van.

I was again off, on my own, yet capably caring for myself, despite Sooner's dismal predictions. Stanley proved an agreeable companion, talking at length and intelligently about the heavenly bodies, of which he had made a study.

CHAPTER XV

THUS began a week rarely illuminating to me as a graduate student of life in the open. Quite early the next morning, after a few hours of needed sleep in my van, which I sought on our arrival at the new town, I was capably assisting my associates in the work of setting up our two establishments and getting the juice joint ready for trade. By nine o'clock, at which time we sat down to breakfast in the rear apartment, all was ready for an efflux of yaps from the surrounding moors.

Roswell was to continue his rôle of Moowoo while Stanley, yet suffering twinges of neuritis, would perform upon the bass drum and deliver the brief oration inside the tent. I, as had been planned, would assist Irene. I was rallied a bit at this meal both by Irene and James, concerning my eagerness to make acquaintance with the drum, and made to promise that I would be careful not to lose it again.

I promised this and readily confessed that I had often longed to learn the technic of so noble an instrument. "I have not before been so situated," I explained, "that I could yield to this whim, and I admit that last night I was rather impetuous when I saw your drum not in use and found myself with an idle moment. Something barbaric in me seems subtly responsive to it. It is a magnificent engine of percussion."

The others seemed oddly overcome by this tribute, which I admit may have been a bit inflated with my very real feeling, but my friend Irene recovered quickly to exclaim, "There, men! Ain't that some snappy billing for one bass drum? Didn't I tell you this boy was a cycle of mirth? I bet he could take that engine of discussion and fill any spot on the bill with a nut-act. He certainly is a comic strip, if you ask me."

Divining the general trend of her praise, I was quick to assure her that my ambition was not excessive. "I doubt if I could perform publicly and alone," I said, "though I dare say that as an accompaniment to your wild man I could go past, as you put it. And as to the few words of introduction within the tent, supplementing the song-and-dance of James outside, I am confident I could deliver them acceptably. In fact"—I remembered Sooner's sincere tribute—"I have been told by an excellent judge that I am nothing less than a male soubrette."

At this all laughed heartily, but not at all in disbelief, I was pleased to note, and we went to our different tasks on a cheering word from Stanley that I might be let to take his place at the drum if his malady continued painful.

I should disclose at this point, perhaps, that I came so near the golden opportunity only to miss it—in all human probability forever. Not to this day, at any rate, have I ever struck a bass drum hard and repeatedly. And all because Roswell, an irresponsible cub, lacked a gift for continuous application, professing to find only ennui in his rôle of the wild man. But I should explain.

The week opened most auspiciously, the turn-up, as Irene called it, being all we could have wished and sufficient to keep us both occupied. I fell to my part of the work with a will and found not a dull hour in the day. Either my tasks engaged me or there would be instructive contact with my fellow artists of the Burke Monster Carnival. La Belle Clarine, the Anatomical Paradox, for example, would issue boldly to our counter for her meals, and I had been correct in believing that trickery accounted for her advertised abnormality. Nor was she by any means so fair of face as her banner professed; a rather hard-featured woman of mature years with an elaborate coiffure, who came to us in a tattered woolen bath gown and devoured great quantities of our staple, having talk with Irene concerning affairs on the lot.

"I was certain she could not be as advertised," I remarked as she left us the first time, and Irene complimented me on my shrewdness.

"You simply can't keep a thing from him," was her admiring comment, though no one besides myself was present.

Other artists, however, I am glad to say, were on a level, such as the tattooed man with his profusely illustrated torso and limbs, the ill-fated Titanic going down under full steam across his shoulders, while on his chest the Emperor Nero fiddled as his capital burned—the latter, of course, an apocryphal scene, but done with considerable verve. There was also a dwarf much too small for his age, and an armless wonder, so called, who wrote with a pen between his toes a far better script than I have been able to achieve with my hand.

These three would sometimes in the rest hour engage in a game of dice at which money was staked, and the skill with which the armless marvel tossed the cubes from his clenched toes was truly remarkable. "Read them and burst into tears!" he would exclaim, and rarely did he fail in a calculation that must have been intricate, the dice seeming to obey his lightest whim, to the consternation of his opponents, particularly the dwarf, who swore as maturely as had he been of full stature.

Various slight mishaps, however, at the beginning of the week brought about a change in my employment. Despite my earnest desire to please Irene, whose mere presence was a boon to me and whose grave scoffing at human foibles never failed to refresh, things would yet go wrong. I need not become too minute of detail, but I did on several occasions forget to return promptly with needed water for the coffee urn, having been distracted once by Lulu, the World's Champion Python Enchantress, and again by the game of skill above mentioned. And later I did rather bungle a job of refilling the oilstove tank, though the explosion was for violence nothing like that occurring at the ill-fated Leffingwell house. Also there was some color of truth in Irene's speech to Stanley about another mishap.

"You should have seen him trip over that first guy rope and do a funny fall with a stack of plates. He's an artist second to none. Talk about your tramp jugglers! Just call his skit Fun in a Crockery Shop and see him get the big-time booking. But it certainly does make a brutal overhead for a snare like this, poppa."

Later she referred to the incident of the oilstove, which I had hoped might be forgotten, still in the vein of droll comment upon my proposed theatrical career. "Give him a plain oilstove with his bass drum—just those two simple props—then turn him loose before an asbestos in one, and all these other nut-acts would be lucky to get the small-time opening spot, take it from me."

It should be said, though, that never did I have an unamiable word from the Hamburger Queen, nor did my possibly awkward behavior even slightly ruffle her vast serenity. Thus, at the time of the no doubt excusable mistake about the oilstove, she merely murmured, "Women and children first!" as she extinguished the trifling blaze; and when I stumbled with the plates, over a taut rope that might well have been elsewhere, she contented herself with exclaiming "God help all animal acts at sea on a night like this!" The speech was quite inapropos, to be sure, yet it served to indicate that she had not been annoyed, and she actually came to pat me on the shoulder as I stood up from the wreck.

I was quick with apologies for what might well have been called my carelessness, but she silenced me with the words, uttered in a low, theatrical manner, "Remember, Jack Dalton, if this child lives you are a beggar! So meet me at the old skating rink at twenty minutes to seven and see that you have the papers with you. Not another word! Now go!"

It will readily be understood that I was anxious not to try too far such superb good humor, and that, though I would have preferred to play the bass drum

when it was suggested that my employment be changed, I yet consented to enact the rôle of Moowoo rather than continue at tasks where the danger of really distressing my employer seemed daily to increase.

Roswell was the first to suggest me in this rôle. "He can put under that stuff," he said. "And me—I'm dog-tired of doing the apple sauce every time a new farmer comes in."

This was at our evening meal, and after a brief consultation it was agreed that I should, the next day, enact the Wild Man from the Madagascar Lowlands.

"It's kind of a shame he can't use some of his talking act," remarked Irene, "though his stuff would probably be over their heads. But at that, he'll show you boys a thing or two. I bet he'll build the part up so you won't know it."

It was this whole-souled partisanship that made me resolve to give my best to the rôle, in which I would otherwise have felt but a languid interest, especially after James had said, "Well, anyway, he can't forget to be on the job, and there's nothing to stumble over and nothing to drop except his accent."

This doubtless worthy fellow with his broad red face, his tilted bowler hat, his shirt of a wide pink stripe with a too large diamond lighting its front, and his always half-smoked cigar cold and nauseous, had shown a gift for irritating me ever since his cheap banter about my loss of the bass drum. Yet I concealed my annoyance.

"My dear old sap," I urbanely said, "I was engaged in skinning Iowa prettily for some weeks before I met you and if I cannot go past with this neat hokum skit in one, then I am not the bonehead I have been reliably

told I am. Stick around and catch my act tomorrow you poor fish!"

This sarcastic sally aroused hearty laughter at the expense of James, even the discomfited fellow himself being obliged to join in as he retorted, "Some little wise-cracker [so-called Educator Cracker] yourself, ain't you, Jas? All right, all right, old sportsman!" Though I had felt no compunction in rebuking him, I was glad to note he could take a joke on himself.

Very early the next morning I attired myself in the scanty garb of the wild man and Roswell affixed my girdle of human hair, the frightful wig, the necklace of teeth, and painted my map after the fashion of the lowest Madagascar natives. Almost at once I began to feel myself in the part, as these artists say. I had truly a violent face when Roswell finished with the pigments, and was not surprised when my associates, on viewing me, professed the liveliest admiration for my desperate appearance.

"We better give him a dog tryout," suggested James, "to see if he can put the other stuff by," and, this being agreed upon, we all went into the tent, where I mounted the platform and seized the knotted war club. First, I was asked to make the growling sounds which were to accompany the rattled chains. Being in excellent voice I did this acceptably, even James approving.

But the real enthusiasm was not aroused until, on getting an office from Roswell, I rose to perform the Madagascene dance. I had kept in reserve my knowledge of any language but theirs, and I now launched into the Vedic hymn, which I delivered with the impassioned fervor of a man truly wild, while, in execut-

ing the simple dance step I had already learned—believing these yaps of the hinterland would be unable to distinguish it as a dance of the North American aboriginal—I gruntingly chanted Greek iambics as I lifted my feet and brandished the club. The result was even more than I had dared hope. My associates applauded me to the echo, nor was the difficult James less pleased than the others as they all quite overwhelmed me with their felicitations. I had put it under.

“Didn’t I tell you,” cried Irene, “that he’d build up the part? Look what he’s done to it! He’s a wilder man right now than Stan ever was, even after he got neuritis. I tell you people, we better put this lad under contract before someone else grabs him.”

“Do it again, Jas,” requested Stanley, and, nothing loth, I repeated the hymn and recited for the good chap some stirring lines of Greek. “Well, well, I’ll be darned!” he admitted when I had finished. “That stuff would certainly get me. It sounds like a regular language.”

“Ain’t it the truth?” agreed Irene. “I bet he’s got a lot more tricks up his sleeve too.”

“It certainly clicks,” admitted James, while Roswell with a winning modesty asserted that the part had never really been done before. With this promising début I began a new professional career. The flocks of eggs and sailors soon began arriving, and after half a dozen shows I felt at home in my new rôle, being confident that I brought fresh touches to the work that neither Stanley nor Roswell had ever thought of. We truly packed them inside, as James said, and this entirely just critic was even generous enough to admit

that he could put more jazz [gravy] into his apple sauce because of knowing that he had back of him a sound attraction that would not disappoint his public. He said it helped a spieler to know he was giving the suckers [poor fish] an even break.

In but one slight detail did I prove remiss—the making of change when money was paid for the photographs—and I readily admitted that fiscal transactions of this sort had ever been beyond me. My shortage at the noon intermission proved to be in the neighborhood of three dollars and eighty cents; it was supposed I had taken a one-dollar spot for a five, besides giving too many coins back for halves and quarters. It was Irene who solved what promised to be an insuperable objection to my continuance in the rôle.

“Easy,” she declared with her wide certainty of manner. “Just lay out a row of chicken feed [fractional kale] on the platform and let the buddies make their own change. It’ll look better, too. I never did like the idea of this shaggy bird from the jungle being so hick about everything else and plumb wise about money. And nobody’d havé the heart to cheat a poor wild man. Try it out and see if you don’t check up proper to-night.”

This astute plan was adopted after some demur, and her prediction came true, as the photographs gone were found at night to be exactly paid for by the money left. I was agreeably relieved by the device. In the first place, I did not care for the photograph, as, quite naturally, it did me no sort of justice, and to unbend from my barbaric austerity for the purpose of handing back small silver to my admirers had extremely irked

me. Now I could retain my distant manner, appear finely unconscious of the brisk trade at my feet. And no one, as Irene, with her flair for mob psychology, had promised, was base enough to defraud a poor wild man.

Ere my first week had passed, however, I found myself in full sympathy with the attitude of Roswell toward this line of work. It was not only monotonous—I had been forbidden to have a magazine with me—but the actual labor of the oft-repeated dance was fatiguing, while the constant strain of keeping in character, both before and after the dance, I found to tell on my nerves. Stanley, for example, whom I had first seen in the part, would relax during the sale of the photographs; it was at such a moment I had perceived that he could not be really as wild as the banner pretended. But this letting down was something my own artistic standards would not permit, even though the ordeal told after twelve hours.

It was but fair, I thought, that Roswell should spell me the following week while I took his place at the drum, which entailed no mental strain whatever. I was aware that the rôle of the wild man would suffer in his hands, as he had never given it serious thought. But to play it day in and out, from ten in the morning till ten at night, throwing one's best energies constantly into it, was too much to ask of any artist, and I determined to say as much.

On Saturday, our last day at this stand, I received, during the supper intermission, fifteen bucks as my stipend, and went to my dressing-room in the van to place the bills in my street clothing. While engaged in pinning them into a coat pocket I came upon an un-

opened letter from Sooner which had at some time been given to me, and this I lost no time in reading, as I had grown anxious about my friend.

"Dear Al," he wrote: "I am in Minnesota and our trouble is over. Your old college chum has gone home to Chi. At least he said he was, but at that he has a crook's eye and right now I would just as soon trust myself on a cobweb stretched across the Miss. river. But it's our next move, and will state facts in plain words. Well I teased the nut from town to town and every town he did his Fairwater Blues number, me pretending like I never saw him.

"Then we make this Jay Center and I think it is far enough because these fur-bearing Swedes have been hunted so they are shy. What had ought to be—a two-year close season declared by Congress to give them a chance to forget the bitter past, though I will say, old pal, I got many a fine pelt to put in my collection of same. (Ha, ha!) But I had to put in another side line consisting of the Hercules Little-Giant Vitalizer or Hinda Wizard Pill, warranted to renew the tired business man after his spring plowing. Anyway I was going to stage the blowoff in this town on account of tough sledding even with the Hercules Pill that will make a colt out of you if took often.

"So you see this other Indian, his name is Geo. Cook and says he comes from K. C. and is a good decent tramp when sober but give him enough to wet his lips and the ship has left port to go down with all hands. Well he watches this poor kloof wave his flag at us in disorderly conduct for a thousand miles and

listens to what I say about him to myself, and got it into his deformed mind I would like for the scoundrel to be killed or something, and having had a couple of shots this night, he climbed out of the bus while I was closing the show and run across the street in a wild manner, waving his tommyhawk at the poor mutt, like saying he had something of his own to wave and it ain't no flag either. So your sleuth turned and run up the street till he come to a tree by the sidewalk which he climbed like a monkey and straddled a limb and starts squealing it is all for the honor of this flag and good old Fairwater and so forth.

"Well this Geo. Cook cannot shin up a tree too good, probably, so the poor mad inebriate stands at the foot and barks like a dog for this outlaw to come down just once and says with tears running down his face I will throw away this little hatchet and kill you with my bare hands like a man. It was going on good when I got there and a crowd making funny cracks and sicking this Geo. Cook wild Indian on his prey. So I get them both gentled and tell old Geo. he will get us in wrong if he kills any one in public and I make him go back to the car and then I coax this lizard to the ground and tell him to come have a nice talk.

"So we go back to the car and I say now take a good long look at this mangy old road-runner and see if he is anyone you recognize and the fathead looked at old Geo. and says why, I admit I have never been more astounded in all my life and it has come on me like a bolt out of the blue because I was certain this was some one totally different from what it undoubtedly is.

"So I says all well enough, Mr. Fairweather, but I

don't want you to make any more of these heinous mistakes in personal identity and I had old Geo. tell his name and how he hails from K. C. and the prune says I am convinced beyond the shadow of any doubt that I have been deceived because this is some other party than I was sure it was going to be. Oh, Mr. Fair-weather, I says, I see it all now. You must have took him for a poor fish I once had doing Indian stuff for me.

"Oh, yes, beyond any shadow of a doubt, he says in a refined and talkative manner. You had with you one who I was watching to see if no harm should come to him without betraying his confidence until he should get back to his right senses but I am sorry now I did not betray his confidence in the first instance and get him safely took care of before the bird had flown.

"I do not know what he meant, Al, and I am not prying into your affairs; I am simply giving you his exact words. Well, I says, I guess now you see you have wasted your sweetness on a desert by waving that do-funny at poor old Geo. here till you got him so annoyed he can hardly keep his hands off of you and would not have done so tonight if you had not been a good climber.

"I thank you for your polite interference, he says, and I wish to apologize gravely for the bitter feeling I have caused and could you inform me where this first party that I thought this party was has gone to?

"Why, yes, I says frankly. He become so awfully crazy I couldn't do a thing with him so he got him a mean-looking six-gun and a one way ticket to Canada and says he was going to this here Hudsons bay to shoot mush rats.

"I wouldn't tell everyone I says but you say you are his friend and well-wisher and I think I know an honest man when I see one. Only one thing, I says, in case you go to this here Hudson's bay looking for him, be very careful, not that you look so much like a mush rat but the old reprobate would take a shot at you at all events because you made him so peevish with your flag and I would hate to see the old toad have murder on his soul even if you was so crazy no jury would hang you but only have a Dr. sentence you to a couple of years for reasonable insanity in some good institute.

"Well the bird promised to be careful but at that, Al, I can't dope him out, because when all is said and done he is nutty clear through and raved on about he being devoted to your best interests on account of some one-cylinder hick college that he is devoted to the best interests of body and soul and his job of hounding you was a sacred commission and he could never forgive himself for letting you escape through his fingers. But I said Cheer up, Roscoe, the rest of us forgive you.

"So no more at present, old Pal and we will soon be sporting again in the world's best game preserve par excellent because this old road-runner Geo. has stuck to one job his limit. All this dried sturgeon wants to do is nothing and then talk all day about the man he used to be in little old K. C. Now for Pete's sake don't you set a foot outside of the pretty yard where I left you and I will soon redeem you from that fair sex with the sewing machine.

"Your friend Sooner Jackson.

"Scout, Guide and Interpreter.

"Parties took care of (Ha, Ha!)"

Twice I read the amazing screed, feeling a sharp annoyance that I had come upon it so late. Indeed, but for the accident of my going to pin the bills in a pocket I might never have had this cheering word from my friend. He had indeed a gift for strategy and cunningly had he baffled the pestilential Meigs. Moreover he had read the creature truly. Bertrand Meigs might have proceeded to Chi., but he would not stay there. No doubt at this moment he was intrepidly searching for me over the tundra and igloos of the Far North where, I gleefully reflected, his insensate persistence would be rewarded as it so richly deserved. At last I was free from a haunting dread of discovery by those who would have haled me back to my prison. While the well-meaning but impossible Meigs toiled on into frozen desolation, perishing at last, perhaps, for want of pemmican or other native food, I could resume with Sooner my chosen career.

Almost any hour, now, this perfect comrade might be along. I delightedly pictured his astonishment and admiration when I should recount my unexpected triumphs after going out on my own. He had believed I was not to be trusted beyond the camp ground. How little he had known my inner resources! While I thus pleasantly mused I was recalled to the present by a summons from Stanley. It was time for the evening show. As I paused for a word with Irene at the kitchen door I could not forbear telling her I had received glad news from my best friend.

"That's good, old scout," she replied; then, regarding me humorously, she added, "It's all right to be a swell dresser on and off, but why the cheaters on Moo-

woo, the terrible man-eater?" Nothing escaped her keen eyes. I had forgotten to remove my spectacles, which I now did as I thanked her for the reminder.

"That's right," she applauded. "Try to grow wilder every day in every way."

As the splendid creature paused there in all her structural magnificence, peering so cordially at me, I was reminded that this was characteristic of her. She would always be flitting from one bit of human behavior to another, observing, praising, deriding, but never tarrying. She was, I thought, like a humming bird that seems to halt in mid-air, its delicate wings beating so rapidly they become invisible, sipping briefly from many blossoms.

To my work that night I brought a new energy and, if possible, a finer interpretive finish. The menace of Meigs had always lurked at the back of my mind and had no doubt hampered my work even when I ceased to be aware of it. Now the obsession had been removed and, too, I need not longer be subjected to the almost continuous strain of my present rendition. I should presently be doing another character that did not so steadily drain my energies.

For some time, at least, I put this new fire into my work. Then, instantly, I felt it die out with a sudden pang of realization. How would my friend find me? I had gone and left him no clue. I was already miles from the spot where last seen; tomorrow I should be still more remote. Annoyance and disgust for this contretemps now seized me. There was no one to be blamed, and yet Sooner would have lost all trace of me. Perhaps even now he would have given up in de-

spair and prevailed upon the road runner, old Geo., to continue with him. Nor could I return to the auto camp, where doubtless by this time the genuine Addison Simms—with a quite proper sense of injury—would be awaiting me with his legal representative, who would institute I knew not what mortifying litigation, possibly resulting in my imprisonment.

I was a little cheered by remembering I might venture to write to Sooner in care of Mrs. Pleasant B. Gale and thus apprise him of my whereabouts. This surely would be discreet. Yet even as I convinced myself of the plan's wisdom I could not free my mind of some very sinister foreboding. My finer senses already sharpened by the strain of my part, I seemed to become sickeningly aware that a doom of some sort impended, though I was never, as it developed, anywhere near divining its true and hideous nature.

Distraught now, fearful of I knew not what, I prayed for the evening's ordeal to end so that I might be free to think coolly. The thing seemed interminable; the senseless drumbeats so close at hand battered upon my tortured ears with a maddening effect, while from outside, the mechanical speech of James, oily and fatuous, seemed an odious mockery: "Step right in, good pee-pul, and view thees world-famiss curee-os-seetay, thees creecha half an an-ee-mal yet half hew-min, cap-chad in the low-lan's of——"

More than once I determined to endure it no longer, yet was held to my post by that fidelity to an ideal which I dare say ever constrains the true artist. How different all might have been had I not clung to this high standard of loyalty; upon how slender a thread

of fortuity swings our destiny moment by moment! My premonition of evil had been sharp, yet I let it pass unheeded; let sheer devotion to my art shackle me too long to my perilous station.

All in an instant I direly knew this—the instant I glanced up to behold in the forefront of a new flock of eggs the vacuous uneasily grinning map of that poor fish, Doctor Hemingway. Even as I blinked at this appalling spectacle there insinuated itself before him from the rear rank of sailors the incredible form and the vilely repulsive pan of none other than Bertrand Meigs.

I still count it an iron devotion to my art that I did not instantly flee. I not only remained but I seized my club, recited the Vedic gem and performed my dance, never, I am sure, more effectively.

The one glance had assured me that both these meddlers were under no least illusion as to my identity. I noted, too, that Meigs, detecting me to observe his presence, at once and with some precipitation shrank again behind the form of the still childishly gaping Hemingway. Without appearing to do so I permitted myself a certain brandishing of my knotted club in the creature's direction, which I hoped he might take as indicating an intention curbed but for the moment. It is probable that I put this past, for at the completion of my dance as the crowd pressed forward, I saw the fiend pluck his senile accomplice by the sleeve and they withdrew from the tent.

Waiting not a moment for the sale of photographs—what was this puerile make-believe to me now?—I dropped to the rear of my rostrum, raised the canvas

wall and was presently running swiftly along the backs of tents. Nor did I halt until, breathless, I closed the doors of my van from the inside.

Hemingway my betrayer! Again I heard the doddering old busybody's feebly genial chatter about his visitor from Chicago who delighted in types—his pleasantly asinine "I must really write to him of you." Too plainly the interfering old mutt had lost no time in writing. And he had ruined all!

CHAPTER XVI

SAFE for the moment, I quickly removed the face paint and changed to my disguise as a rustic. Hardly done with this I heard a discreet tapping at the door of the van, and opened it to find my associates anxiously gathered there. Noting that we were in darkness I boldly descended to the ground. Why, they demanded, had I walked out?

I was moved to confide my plight to these good people. True, I must still dissemble at one point, but I could make my danger sufficiently plain; indeed I succeeded in doing so with but a few words. It was remarkable how quickly they understood that I was a hunted man, and again, as with Sooner Jackson, I perceived how ready the underworld is to protect its own.

"A plain-clothes man, eh?" demanded Stanley.

"I did not note his dress tonight," I rejoined, "though usually it is anything but plain. He runs to loudish checks, and cravats of the flashiest sort."

"From Chicago, you say?" asked James.

"Yes," I replied. "You see, I knocked off a couple of guys back there, but I don't need to tell you they gravely required it. I didn't turn the old staff loose until it had to be done."

I realized that this created rather a sensation. "Mercy!" exclaimed Irene. "But why didn't he make the pinch right there?"

"It's this way," I explained. "He lacks as yet some of the goods on me; meantime he is following my trail in the most vicious manner, and any moment he is liable to come with a couple of bulldogs and pinch me thoroughly. Tomorrow, wherever we are, he will be there watching me."

"You mean he'll follow this show?" she took me up sharply.

"Exactly. He has pursued me over some of the best hunting preserves in this sportsman's paradise. It is impossible to shake him off. One thinks one has—but one hasn't. He is always there."

Irene stood a moment in deep thought, the three others regarding her hopefully. The men, as eager as she to assist me, yet looked up to her, as I saw must be their custom in emergencies. At last she spoke briskly and with none of her accustomed levity.

"Listen, people, I found it out this afternoon; the Gus Reddick show will pass us tonight about two hours up the road. They'll be making their jump. Joe Feiber was by and said we got so close together because Gus got car route wrong; he was nearly playing against us next week. Now this is the dope: Stan, you hustle over and borrow that car of the snake concession a few minutes till I run up to the nearest telephone. While I'm gone you boys get everything struck and loaded. You, Jas, you come into our car and keep the door shut till I get back."

No one thought of disputing or even questioning these orders. After a long time within the dark car, listening to the men load our gear into the van, my ear caught the note of Irene's car returning and when I

opened the door she was already telling Stanley that her mission had been successful.

"I had an awful time getting anyone," she said. "They were just striking. But at last Gus himself come to the phone and I had him send over Vera to talk and it's all fixed. She and Clyde are together again and they're to park this side of a bridge where we both broke down one time, and wait till we come."

She seemed content with what she had arranged, and I wondered what new adventure might be mine. But this was no time to ask. After cautioning me to retire once more within the car she moved off with her husband, saying as she went, "We couldn't turn the poor old fluff [sap] loose—he's too helpless. Just a human blur [an unlucky guy]!"

The loading done, she returned, telling me to lie down on one of the couches and sleep if I could. "We'll be about two hours getting to this place where Vera's to be," she added as our car moved off, "so take it easy, old boy. They haven't yet got you inside looking out, and we're certainly going to fool this dick tonight by one clever switch. Tomorrow he'll be up in the air again. I hope he chokes when he gets wise."

The kindly soul now seated herself on the couch opposite me and while I lay at ease she spoke again of our switch or deception. "This Vera La Montagne is a good pal of mine ever since we was both out with the Sporting Paris Widows—that was before I kind of matured. She's all white; she'd do murder if I told her to. So you stick by Vera. Then this husband of hers that is with her again, he's a hell-diver [aquatic bird]. He comes up for a spell and then goes under again.

Just now he's up, but he's all right, at that, so take any steer he gives you. He plays the piano with Red-dick, and he's some Humpty-Dumpty on it too. If that boy had kept up his music he'd be drawing top money. But he wants it to come easy. What he really aims to be, as near as I can dope him, is one of these gentlemen crooks. Anyway, you'll know how to handle him, and these two will put you on your way, especially Vera. The show's working south and we're working north, so pretty soon you'll be hard to find."

As I listened to the low murmur of her voice I was soothed to rest and presently lost consciousness.

I awoke, aware that our rather bumpy progress had ceased. The thoughtful Irene had flung a rug over me as I slept, and I was again drifting off into a fantasy of unrelated visions when the door of the car opened and the good woman stood beside me gently twitching my shoulder.

"All ready, Jas," she told me in hardly more than a whisper. I sat sleepily up, groping in the darkness for my hat. "Here!" She handed the hat to me and clutched one of my arms as I stumbled away from the car.

Once outside, the cool night air brought me awake and I was again alert. Our two vans were halted by the roadside and loomed ghostly in the moonlight filtering through the rising mist.

"Everything's gone as per schedule," said Irene, still in tones cautiously muffled. "Vera and Clyde are parked just ahead; I've put them wise and you'll be as safe with them as if you was in a church. We'll wait till the rest of the show gets by."

I now saw that other heavy vans lumbered past us. There was something grim about these tremendous phantoms looming briefly out of the darkness, a shrouded form crouched dimly at the wheel of each. They were like monsters from an old day searching under cover of night a fresh lurking place, or, more terrifying, the caravan of an invading army that day would reveal intrenched somewhere. At the moment I felt little zest for this new adventure; the ghostly procession seemed to rumble the most sinister portents. I would have been glad to stay by the Hamburger Queen and let Meigs do his worst. It was now, I believe, that I felt the first great letting-down from my falsely stimulated elation. There in the mist I had, I think, my first glimmerings of an ineluctable and all too devastating certainty that was presently to lay me low.

As we waited three muffled figures approached and while I speculated if any one of the three could be Meigs, my hand was being shaken by James, Roswell and Stanley. "Good luck, old boy!" they hoarsely whispered, and James warmly admonished me, "Never lay down your hand; keep on rising just as if you were in possession of them."

I thanked the loyal fellows for their help and, the vans seeming all to have passed, I was conducted by Irene to a darkened car farther up the road. Two heavily wrapped forms occupied the front seat of this, and to these my guide presented me. Vera, who apparently drove, briefly flashed a small light over my face, exclaiming, "Hello, pop! Climb in back and cover up with those rugs and coats." Her husband,

Clyde, after a nod to me had engaged Irene in talk.

"I'm hep [helpful]," he at length told her. "We'll have him setting pretty—see what I mean?"

Irene now came to shake my hand, saying, with a faint flash of her gaiety, "Don't forget your little school friend, Jas."

Eagerly I sought to let her know that through all my days she must be a lovely memory, but at this moment of our actual parting I found I was oddly affected by an incoherence of speech—a disability from which I rarely suffer. I yearned to utter so many fine, warm, queer things that suddenly overran my mind in the rankest disorder as this woman enfolded my hand in a gentle but stirring clasp. Yet I made a mess of it.

"I am sure——" I mumbled, and broke off in a confusion that I could feel hot in my face. I wanted to say she would ever to my last moment—until darkness came over the sight of the fallen warrior—be a trove of memories all golden, things light and with wings, to be endlessly cherished. But I said nothing of the sort and felt myself shrug with disgust at what I did say—some futile try at her own airy style to the effect that our act would have stood them on their feet had we been let to continue it in one or even in two. "We could have had all the books we wished on the big time," I assured her with this assumed lightness.

"Right you are, Jas," she replied. She strengthened her clasp on my hand. "Do you know what you are, Jas? You are just a wistful old bearcat. But don't let down. No matter if you happen to strike a sour

note, keep on with the music. Maybe we'll team up again sometime. I hate to trust you out of my sight; but you may make the grade, at that. Even a blind hog gets an acorn now and then."

"Thank you," I stupidly said, and saw her great dark outline fade into the mist—as if this alone could fittingly embrace her.

Our own lights flashed on and with no other word we took the road. There were rugs and coats cluttered about my feet; adjusting some of these to protect me from the damp air I relaxed with a bag for a pillow, saying to myself perfectly what I should have said to the Hamburger Queen. I said it over and over until my tired mind revolted and my half-dreaming reverie became oddly filled by concepts of pure dimension wholly dis severed from substance and even from shape. I pictured vastness as tangible and endowed it with a native nobility. I thought of beautiful great shapes waveringly vague, tremendous phantoms of loveliness at last defining themselves against their background of a golden mist.

Then the brute male in me grew lawless. I saw myself no longer plain, dull, elderly, but a handsome, dashing gallant, a veritable Addison Simms, not only successful but famous, widely respected as he whose name I had so clumsily chosen, one in whose near presence women might feel troubled, at least beyond a calm that would permit them to call him a wistful old bearcat; one, in short, with a magnetic personality whose power over such as won his notice would be found all too plausible by casual reporters.

This, to be sure, was lunacy, yet of a not unfamiliar

type. Has not each of us his own secret Addison Simms—even the most humble-minded his conquering other self who again and again he stubbornly asserts he truly is, and never so brazenly as in the face of icy frustration? Now in a lawless interlude I was this superb other self. Yet these lifting raptures so quickly fade; presently I drowsed, thinking to the last of large and noble shapes. I thought of the splendid great drum—of the Rocky Mountains—and of Irene Wisenheimer.

Again I was brought from sleep by the kind hand of a woman on my shoulder. The car had stopped and my eyes opened to the friendly face of Vera, who stood beside it. "Are you all right, pop?" she inquired. I assured her that I had rested well. Moving to descend from the car I heard her counsel me to remain where I was. "Stick there," she said, "till Clyde gets the tent up. Then we'll fix you out with a new make-up. It's better to change because your gentleman friend back there"—she gestured significantly over her shoulder—"must be wise to this one."

I thanked her and settled back in the car as she bade me, observing that her husband was busily fixing a sheet of canvas from the car's top to the ground. He seemed a personable youth in a cap and rough sweater, and was wholly absorbed in his task. Vera, enveloped to the chin in a coat of rich fur, was now removing chests and bags from the running board and rear of the car and placing them within the canvased inclosure. Looking out about us I observed the pale fires of dawn to light a busy scene. On every hand vans were unloading and near us an immense tent was being

raised into position by groups of men who chanted at their work, while several lesser tents were already up.

One of the largest vans stood broadside to me and across it in great letters of gold on a dull-red ground ran the inscription Gus Reddick's All-Star Theatrical Aggregation. In smaller letters beneath were the words, Living Actors in Latest New York Drama Successes.

On several occasions Mrs. Copplestone and I had gone to the city to witness eminent players in Shakspearean rôles, but I had never, to my knowledge, seen a late New York success. Now I was not only to see many but I had actually crossed a boundary into that magic world beyond the footlights. All about me living actors were engaged in driving stakes or hauling on ropes to elevate sheets of canvas, and I presently threw off my dejection. I was one of a band of strolling players, mountebanks, drolls, mimes, merry-andrews, and I reflected a pretty while upon the new excitements doubtless in store for me. A number of the artists presently began to erect at the still open end of the big tent, a platform or stage upon which I divined they would later perform.

Clyde, having finished the canvas structure of which our car formed a side, opened several of the bags within it and now called to me. Descending, I saw that he held some clothing before him as he ran his narrowed eyes over my form.

"These ought to do," he said, and while my glance questioned him he continued. "Now, pop, get out of the Tad production and put these on," at the same time laying the garments he held on a folding chair and leaving me to change.

The suit he offered me I saw would be one of his own. Assuredly it was not one I would have chosen for myself, a thing of striking black-and-white checks with a short belted coat that gave the whole an air of frivolity. I reflected as I changed, however, that it would inevitably disguise me to all who had associated me with sober attire, and I saw that Clyde had been right in believing the things would fit me. In addition to the clothes, he had also laid out a shirt of loud stripes in lavender together with a collar and a strikingly scarlet cravat.

Completely dressed in this noticeable raiment I stood looking down at myself with mingled emotions when Clyde raised the tent flap and entered, followed by Vera. Both exclaimed at the change wrought in my appearance, and Vera remarked, "Pop, if your camera-eye friend met you now he wouldn't know you from a bar of soap."

"Wait till you see the thatch, though," urged Clyde, who had brought, I saw, a wig. It was a blond wig, rather long and wavy, and the good chap proceeded to pull it over my skull, after which he arranged the hair about my ears and above my brow in such a manner as to deceive, I thought, the keenest eye.

Vera, who had watched the process, now took a hat from an open trunk and fixed it on my head. It was a flat-crowned straw hat with a band of three lively colors, a hat such as Meigs might have selected for himself. Indeed my whole appearance, I saw, would rather suggest his own—one of fate's little ironies, I thought.

"Perfect!" cried Vera, standing off to view me, then

coming to tilt the hat to ever so slight an angle. "Pop, you are now a leading juvenile, if anyone should ask you. Ain't he, Clyde? All he needs is a stick and yellow gloves and a field glass over his shoulder, and he could walk on in the big race scene. But you are sure going to remain at liberty, pop, as we say in the profession."

"He looks a million to me," agreed Clyde, favoring me with another critical survey. "But the cook tent is open. Let's go tune in with the good old catfish and cornbread."

The three of us were presently seated in one of the larger auxiliary tents partaking of an appetizing breakfast, though the particular edibles named by Clyde were not served. The latter was still in cap and sweater, but Vera had doffed her splendid fur coat and revealed a gown of ruby lawn that emphasized her dark beauty. For the woman was beautiful with her stormy eyes and delicately modeled contours of face and form. Her dusky hair was short and curled closely to her small head, which tossed freely as she talked, suggesting a person of independent judgments. She was not, to be sure, of Irene's striking loveliness, lacking her gracious amplitudes, yet she had her own merit.

As we ate we were joined by other artists, who sat about the long crude table, and from the talk I learned that this being Sunday, our dramatic performance would give place to a sacred concert. I saw quickly that my attire excited no comment among these people, who were all given to curiousness of dress and ornament; my own suit was but a device of protective coloration.

To her fellow artists Vera presented me as her cousin, Hector Montague, and one of them, a sad-eyed man of middle age, wished to know if I were any relation to a certain Musical Montague.

"No, Hector is not the same family as that pickled walnut," Vera quickly replied for me.

"He may be all you claim," rejoined the speaker—who was rather more soberly garbed than his fellows and seemed, indeed, to have long lived a life of genteel poverty—"but all the same he has saxoed his way to top money. He had forty weeks with the Real Guy's Company last season, and has a park job this summer."

"I can see him from here," remarked Vera severely and with one of her emphatic head-tossings. "That big quince three-sheeting himself all over the place!"

"Top money, just the same, dearie," replied the other. I thought his address offensively familiar, but no one else seemed to, and he was presently complaining that recent audiences had not applauded him with the right fervor. "I got a good line of stories, most of them clean," he submitted, "but they don't seem to get my stuff."

He was here annoyed by the languid drawl of a dashing handsome youth at the lower end of the table who interposed, "They might get it if it was yours."

"Say not so, Lucile," acidly returned the other. "I originated every gag and bit of business I use."

"Possibly, possibly," retorted the caustic youth, as he carelessly held up a hand and seemed to scrutinize his polished nails, "but I'd never have taken you to be that old. They were having to beg bows for a lot of your stuff when the elder Booth was in his cradle."

"Back up, Claude, or you'll meet Number Nine at the grade crossing," replied the sad-eyed man in a surprisingly good-natured tone, for it was plain the younger chap had sneered at him. "And kidding aside, I'll wise you to what's jolted our profession. It's the movies. We get over all right, but the folks out front don't make the old-time fuss because the movies have got 'em mitt-bound."

"Right you are, Sam," agreed another artist, who had not yet spoken. "At that last town we played there was hicks that thought all shows was screen shows and had never heard of talking actors. They didn't seem to get the idea at all."

This, to me, cryptic talk was interrupted by the approach of one whom Vera announced with, "Enter the big boss, smiling."

"Good morning, children," the new arrival greeted cheerfully. "This here is one tent show where the turn-up is always good at meal-times." And he laughed huskily at his own speech.

"Now he'll have to go into his dance," remarked the sad-eyed Sam. "You can't hardly call it a talking act, because that's the only line he's got."

"Kid me, children; kid the old man along!" replied the newcomer in the same husky rich tone as he took a seat next to Vera. He was thickly built with a great round chest and a heavy beardless face tanned and mottled. His dark wiry hair stood up from a low brow, his eyes were but small shrewd gleams set deep in the encroaching flesh, and the collar of his white shirt fell back to reveal a massive neck.

"Gus, shake hands with my cousin, Hector Mon-

tague," said Vera, and the other cordially did so, saying, "In the profession, too, I see," as he eyed me.

"I have had a short season with the Wisenheimers, of the Burke Carnival," I answered.

"Sure, they're all Wisenheimers with that outfit," he remarked as he fell to his breakfast. "I wish they'd quit dutching my route."

"Hector is resting just now," Vera said, and the talk was diverted from me by the handsome youth, who still lingered at the end of the table.

"Mr. Reddick, just because I have a frock coat and a gray wig, is it fair to make me play lawyers and ministers all the time? Don't I get a chance at the real gravy?"

"But you're learning your art, my boy, don't forget that. And try to make your bits stand out. That's the way I got my start. I never measured a part's importance by its sides. I'd study, study—see what I mean—work and then work, even on a bit part. I pledge you my word it ain't the size that counts. How about it, Montague?" he demanded, turning to me.

"Vergil toiled seven years on his Georgics," I replied, "yet they could doubtless be printed in as many newspaper columns."

"There you are, Claude. Seven years this guy worked till he made his hit. And you with the show seven weeks and expecting to hog all the fat. You trust your Uncle Gus, boy."

"Even with a small part," I suggested, "one is constantly surprised to find new points that may be elaborated. I have built up parts in my time in a quite astonishing way."

Mr. Reddick attempted to comment on this, but, his mouth being full at the moment, he merely waved to the young aspirant that he should note my corroboration. Presently when he could speak he said, "I got a repertoire that's a liberal education to any young actor that will take his work seriously—see what I mean?"

I asked if the repertoire comprised Hamlet, this being the last play I had witnessed.

"Not in the sticks," Mr. Reddick answered. "The fact is, I have to meet the rabble halfway."

"I dare say, however, your repertoire includes *Œdipus Rex*," I said, recalling the production of this noble work by our senior dramatic association.

"I didn't quite get the name," replied my host. "Is it a hit?"

"One of the greatest," I replied. "*Œdipus Rex* has won the plaudits of the world's greatest critics. It is a masterpiece, a sure-fire hit, as we say in the profession."

Mr. Reddick seemed to search his mind in some perplexity. "Funny—and I get *Billboard* and *Variety* every week too. I can't remember anything about this *Rex* piece. But maybe they panned it. When either of them pans a show I forget it. What's the idea of it anyway?"

Perceiving that Vera and Clyde, as well as my host, were interested, I briefly sketched the argument of this powerful drama that has so ably stood the test of time. I had barely finished when Mr. Reddick frowningly shook his massive head.

"It's got an idea," he admitted. "The hokum is sound, but, my word, *Montague*, the sticks wouldn't

ever stand for sex stuff as raw as that. I suppose there's a snappy bedroom scene and so forth."

"There is but one setting or scene," I explained.

"Well, that cuts down the production costs, and so far so good. But we got to draw the line somewhere. This wouldn't do for us—too strong entirely. I'll tell you where it would go, though, if you're interested in the piece. It'll go in these intimate theaters—what they call Little Theaters—and I know the man for you. I got a brother in the business out in Los Angeles that's gone into the Little-Theater line, and he says the rawer the stuff the better they like it. He says next year they're going to have the biggest Little Theater on the Coast—everything runs to size out there—and I bet his public would eat up this stuff you're telling about. Of course he'd probably want to change the name; I can't give that title anything. You want something like Purple Passion. Mother Love might do—only that's just a little bit to the Edam, considering the stuff."

"Edam? But it's not a Dutch play," I objected. "It's Greek."

"Funny thing I never caught the notices," he replied, "but I'll give you a letter to my brother; he's the boy can shape it up, even if it is Greek."

I saw how impossible it would be to give this man any adequate understanding of the great drama in question, and as our meal was finished I left with Clyde and Vera. Once outside, Clyde turned to me with sparkling eyes.

"Monte, I've just made you! I've got a part that was simply written for you, a great part you couldn't

fall down in, with a flag finish—a green flag finish—see what I mean?”

“No, what do you mean?” I asked.

“It’s so good I can’t tell you now,” he answered evasively. “But it’s a simple plot with one prop, and you’ll love it. You’ll be able to go on and stop the show after one rehearsal, but first we got to make sure your friend has left. I don’t want to get you in bad.”

I was not averse to trying another part, and wondered what Clyde would have for me, but he remained reticent until late that afternoon, when Vera came to us with a beaming face.

“Irene promised to call me up at four,” she said, “so I was at the phone, and pop is sitting pretty. She says his friend with two other plain-clothes boys come along this morning and simply combed the carnival for him before they’d believe he wasn’t there. Irene told them from the start that pop had taken a night train for Omaha, and at last they believed her and went their way. Nifty work, what?”

So my annoyers were at least a hundred miles distant and I might again breathe freely. Clyde, too, rejoiced. “Now,” he told me, “I can begin to lay out our route for one of the best skits I ever wrote. And it opens this way: You’re standing right there thinking about nothing and I come up and say, ‘It’s like this, pop. I got a boy friend that’s in the grocery business in this town and I want you to help me play the dandiest practical joke on him that anyone ever thought of. It’s just simply ridiculous.’”

At this he laughed aloud, leaving me still no wiser about the part I was to enact.

CHAPTER XVII

EARLY that evening a throng of helots from the surrounding pastoral colony, garbed in all manner of Sabbath finery, began to stream through the door of our snare or dump, as the artists variously called the big tent; many rows of the seats were filled when I entered with Clyde. We stood a moment at the rear of the auditorium, chattering with Mr. Reddick, who took the tickets that had been purchased from his wife sitting in a small enclosed booth just outside the door. The big boss professed himself pleased with the turn-up, though admitting a worry about the weather.

"Rain is the only thing that kills us," he said, "and I don't think so much of tomorrow. A red sun has water in his eye and the old ball was certainly red tonight."

"You are," I said, "presenting a sacred concert this evening, I believe."

"Well, sacred to a reasonable extent," he replied. "Of course, not too d—d sacred. Just enough to get by." And he chuckled shrewdly as we left him. Among the auditors already assembled several actors were passing with baskets of prize packets, so-called, which they urged upon the throng and which contained, in addition to bonbons, certain trifles no doubt of small intrinsic worth but yet appealing to the assembled

bums, who purchased them eagerly. Clyde directed my attention to these hawkers.

"Vera thought you might do an audience act with that junk," he told me, "but it ain't such a juicy grift. And anyway I thought up this other sketch that I believe you got a unique talent for. If you can put the stuff over, why, you can simply write your own ticket. We'll have it slathered on us."

"If the part you speak of demands skill in calligraphy, I ought to tell you that I write an execrable hand," I warned him. "I doubt if I could write even a ticket legibly."

"There, that's the stuff I mean!" he exclaimed delightedly. "You certainly have the line. I'd fall for it myself."

When I would have questioned him further he demurred, saying, "You'll see tomorrow when we set the plant. Now I got to go make a piano talk." And he stepped over quickly to one of these instruments just below the stage, seated himself and made it talk, indeed. He was beyond any question a superb musical artist and must have devoted years of study to the difficult art. Never had I heard a piano played so rapidly.

Taking a chair at the rear I studied a program that had been thrust into my hands by one of the actors doing an audience act. Grand Sacred Vaudeville Concert, it announced, the first item being The Granite City Four. Four what? I was wondering when Clyde brought his selection to a noisy and skilful close, the curtain parted centrally and four actors marched out in single file. They were arrayed in evening dress,

though this was not too well pressed and showed luminously in places as if from long use. But I instantly forgot this minor defect when they sang with blended voices that fine old song known as The Lost Chord, following it after hearty applause with another favorite of mine, Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep. The actor who sang bass was particularly effective and our audience was deeply impressed, applauding most respectfully; indeed they were almost solemn in their acknowledgments.

The four still in line, the bass, adopting a light conversational tone, remarked to his fellows, "Well, that's over. Now come on, boys, and let us sing some of them good old college songs of ours." On this they dashed with the most rollicking abandon into what was indeed a college song, though I gravely doubted if the bass were a university man. Our audience, however, vastly enjoyed it and the ensuing selections, all of which were of a light character and seemed to me out of place in a sacred concert. Then I recalled Mr. Reddick's admission that this entertainment would be sacred only to an extent. He had spoken truly, for not again during the evening was there any number that could be called sacred in the true sense of the word.

Next came my friend, named on the program as Vera La Montagne, America's Queen of Jazz. With her complexion made brilliant by artificial means, her strikingly cut evening gown and her careless, wicked look, there was, as she sang, a sort of dark daring about her, a diablerie emphasized by the song, which was full of the most wanton implications, made even

more pointed by the continuous play of her stormy lawless eyes. The song itself was of a curious structure, full of broken rhythms and apparently meaningless repetition, as:

“I want someone—someone—in the moonlight,
 I said moonlight, in the summer night,
 Someone—someone—to hold me tight,
 I said tight——”

Those at least were the approximate words, half-sung, half-chanted to a quick little tinkling accompaniment played by Clyde. And yet, throughout the performance, despite the boldest eye play, the shrugging scorn for convention, the explicit warning that here was a creature willing to forget all in one mad moment, I subtly felt that Vera was, at heart, a good woman, an impression strengthened by one of her later selections, in which she sang of her stanch regard for a dear old mother in the sunny southland. Vera, I saw, might indeed fill a big place in America's heart.

A nimble youth now came out and danced excessively about the stage. I was unable to see that he achieved anything definite or worth while by his exertions, though the audience applauded briskly, being doubtless stirred by a rhythmic patter of the feet that left me quite unmoved.

He was followed by a child artist, La Petite Dorine, the Première Rosebud of Radiance, and although I felt certain she would be the slight but obviously middle-aged woman I had noticed in the cook tent at luncheon, she gave a really convincing imitation of a miss of seven or eight with her white knee-length skirts,

her baby socks and sandals, and her sunbonnet with its blue bits of ribbon that fell carelessly from her golden curls. After a song about a childish playmate she spoke intimately to the audience in her artless infantile dialect with a lisp, chiefly of the peccadillos of her father. These were of such a nature that only her childish ignorance could have excused her relating them, particularly his amatory passages with a maid, of which, in all innocence, she had frankly spoken to her mother. It was not in the best of taste, I considered, though again the bums about me applauded it to the echo.

Now appeared Mr. Reddick himself to announce a succeeding bill. "Tomorrow afternoon and evening," said he affably, "my company of world-famous stars will have the honor of presenting to your notice that great emotional drama entitled East Lynne, which will be staged with all the effects that marked its metropolitan production and with the original New York cast. I hope none of you will miss this thrilling heart-drama and that all of you will tell your friends. Don't fail to see this greatest of all shows with a punch. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you."

When Mr. Reddick had gone the piano sounded some loud chords and there shambled on to the stage a grotesque creature whom I did not at first identify. Scanning the program I saw announced, Sam Herk and Will G. Feiber, Those Different Dogs, Fresh from New York, in Their Unequaled Comedy Surprise Entitled Bits of Hits.

Now I recognized the merry-andrew before me as the sad-eyed person who had that morning complained

that his stuff was not had. He was curiously dressed, all his garments being much too small. His trousers revealed a length of red hose above his immense shoes, his coat sleeves were short, showing that he wore but one cuff loosely on his bare wrist, his linen the flimsiest pretense, consisting of but a stiff shirt bosom which constantly escaped from his narrow coat to his great annoyance when he was obliged to replace it. His face was painted in a crude manner, and upon his head a tiny hat was fastened by elastic. At intervals he would lift this hat and allow it to snap back into place.

"As I was walking across the Atlantic Ocean this morning——" he began, only to be interrupted by loud guffaws from the hicks before him. Pretending to be disconcerted by this reception, he lifted and released his hat, exclaiming, "Who is it you lost your dog?" This aroused more of the boorish laughter, the fellow grimacing violently while it lasted, and inquiring with a leer when he could be heard, "Is it not impossible?" Then his manner became confidential. "Listen, folks," he began, "I was down to a party the other evening and I enjoyed myself very nice. Just as I entered a fat man got up . . ."

He wandered into a series of humorous anecdotes which he related not without finesse, and I saw that he was, indeed, a competent droll, particularly by reason of his absurd mannerisms. For example, at each point he made he would, after the ensuing laughter, snap his little hat on his head and comically demand, "Who is it you lost your dog?" More than once I found myself chuckling at the senseless antic.

And now he was interrupted by a properly and indeed rather elegantly dressed young man carrying a stick, gloves and newspaper, who hurried across the stage behind him, apparently unaware of the droll's presence. Just as he was about to disappear the latter called, "What, ho, Mr. Feiber, are you training for a race?" Instantly the other halted his swift pace and, turning about, crisply replied, "No, I am racing for a train."

"Who is it you lost your dog?" retorted the droll, with the familiar snapping of his little hat, and I detected that the whole scene had been devised merely for the play on words. Loud laughter ensued, however.

The second actor now approached his grotesque companion and, after scanning him closely, appeared to consult the newspaper he carried. Suddenly he glanced up from the sheet, and to my horror said, "Tell me—tell me, are you not the long-lost Addison Simms?"

The appalling byplay that followed is deeply graven on my memory. The grotesque fellow first looked about him as if in alarm, which he expressively pantomimed, then clutching his questioner by the arm said in a hoarse whisper, "Come over to this side where the audience can't hear me." Together, then, with elaborate airs of precaution, they tiptoed across the stage, where the droll, after another glance about him, placed his lips to the other's ear. But instead of the secretive whisper one naturally anticipated he loudly yelled, "Yes—why not?"

"But tell me, tell me, Mr. Simms," the other began in his more polished manner. "The paper says you have decamped to parts unknown."

"I was blown out to sea by a gale," retorted the buffoon, and then, turning to the audience with an evil leer, he demanded, "Any of you ladies want a nice house guest that's out of work?"

"Ha! I guessed as much," retorted his companion, with another cheap word-play.

To my stupefaction the hicks tittered and guffawed throughout this unparalleled exhibition of bad taste, seeming quite to understand the malicious allusions. I could bear the thing no longer and quietly stole out into the night, hearing another roar of coarse laughter as I went, aroused doubtless by some fresh bit of the impertinence. It was plain that my affair had become rather a *cause célèbre*, and yet, I was cheered to reflect, not one of these people could suspect me to be the pseudo Simms. I was still safe. I had no heart, however, for more of the so-called sacred vaudeville, even though the following number on the program had piqued my curiosity, this being Helene Latour, the World's Foremost Lady Barytone, Fresh From European Triumphs. Secreting myself in the tent of Clyde and Vera I could surmise that the scandalous pair within were still making game of the man I had so unwittingly brought into disrepute, for the gusts of hick laughter and applause were well-nigh incessant.

Presently, too, I did hear the low stern notes of the lady barytone in some ballad rich with a saddened longing. It came appositely to my mood; I was beginning to feel a curious despair. From the moment of severing my relations with the Burke Monster Carnival I seemed to have been steadily aging into a conviction that I could no longer struggle against brutal

and overwhelming odds. I doubted now if even the inveterate optimism of Sooner Jackson could again stimulate me to the carefree heights I had reached when he left me. Some corroding acid of disillusion insidiously gnawed at my spirit.

That "sacred" flouting of all the decencies came at last to an end and the arrival of Clyde and Vera after their evening's work sufficed to raise me a little from this depression, especially as Clyde was now vivacious about the new part I was to play. When he showed me to my pallet in one of the vans he directed me to take along my disguise as a rustic and to don this on the morrow. "For," he explained, "that glass-crash [Meigs] is miles from here and your Tad make-up is exactly what the part needs. You'll laugh your head off when you see what we're going to pull."

So elated was this ingenuous friend, I felt, as I have said, a slight new stirring of my old ardor for the wild life, though by no means was I as yet the man I had been. Perhaps, however, this undisclosed plan of Clyde's would quite restore me. I hoped, without actual believing.

Early the next morning I arrayed myself once more in the dingy garb of a not-too-prosperous hick, taking care to have one trouser leg caught at the top of a boot. Truth to tell, I felt rather more assured in this unpretentious raiment than in the somewhat flamboyant disguise of an actor which I had worn the day before. It is probable that I never should have been wholly at ease in those checks and lavender stripes with more than a touch of scarlet at the throat and the straw hat of a Meigs-like nattiness.

Clyde hailed me from his tent with a light of joyous anticipation in his eyes—a rather impish anticipation, I thought—and we breakfasted together before any of the other artists appeared. Then we returned to his tent, where he brought me a basket which for some reason I was to carry—one of those familiar affairs so commonly used for shopping expeditions. With a final sweeping survey that took in every item of my apparel, he nodded approvingly and conducted me to a near-by motor car.

As we moved off toward town he instructed me, "Now, pop, this first act is simple. You are in to buy a few groceries, see what I mean? You want a loaf of bread and a bunch of celery or any green stuff you see. Then you say, as if you just remembered, 'Oh, yes, I want a can of peaches and a can of tomatoes,' just like that—see what I mean? And the grocer puts them into your basket for you and you pay him and walk out after a little chatter about what good weather we are having and will it rain pretty soon, and so on. Only one thing you got to remember; there's a boy in this store, but don't let him wait on you. Do business with the old man himself, see what I mean? He's an old rummy in a Lincoln make-up, except his hair is plastered down over what little forehead he's got and he looks like someone that would cut your eye out for a dime or the two of them for fifteen cents—see what I mean? He's the one you want to talk to. And just use your own line of talk, you know, sort of innocent with big words here and there. Do you get me?"

"I have you," I replied. "I am to make these pur-

chases of the proprietor himself and in our casual chat about weather and crop conditions I am to employ my own natural speech—not the farm or yap dialect.”

“That’s right. Don’t try any stunts. Just use your own dialect.”

I smiled to myself at the ingenuous belief that I used a dialect, but forbore to enlighten him, for we now came to a halt in one of the town’s business thoroughfares.

Clyde here gave me a quantity of bank notes loosely rolled, saying, “When you pay for the stuff be sure to let old Gaspard see all this. It’ll make him mad to think anyone else has so much money and he’ll remember it in Act Two. And the store is the first one around this corner—Ezra Marsh, Cash Grocery—you can’t miss it. I’ll wait here.”

Although this new part seemed to promise not the least artistic thrill, I resolved to give it my best effort, and I was presently chatting with the grocer who had been described to me, while he placed my purchases in the basket, including the tin of tomatoes and one of peaches. As I paid for the stuff from my crumpled roll of money I was aware that the fellow’s eyes did glitter with sharpened interest, since he was doubtless astonished to see one of my mean appearance in possession of more than a usual quantity of money. He gave me my change with a final comment on the weather—he was of the opinion that it would rain or would not rain very soon, I forget which—and I left him with a “Good morning!” pleased at having carried out my very curious instructions.

Around the corner I went to our car, where Clyde ex-

pectantly awaited me, with words of praise when he learned that all had gone well. I restored to him the bank notes, placed the basket with my purchases in the car's tonneau and was about to take my seat beside Clyde when I was startled by a vaguely familiar voice calling from a little distance, "Mr. Simms—just a moment, Mr. Simms!"

I glanced uneasily about to observe a young man walking swiftly toward us from the corner I had so swiftly turned. At first sight I did not identify him, but as he came on I recognized the infernal degenerate who had written of me in the public press. Aghast at his odious effrontery—he had actually a glad look on his face as he approached—I turned coldly away, resolved to cut him dead and took my seat in the car. Nothing daunted he came up to its side, again saying, "Mr. Simms—just a moment, Mr. Simms!"

At this I quite lost my temper with the blackguard and cried sharply to him, "Be off with you, sir!" Clyde quickly started our car so that the scoundrel was left there on the curb with a quite comic look of bewilderment on his foolish but evil face.

"Say, that wasn't one of the lads looking for you, was it?" demanded Clyde with deep concern.

"Not anyone of the slightest importance," I replied. "He is an unspeakable nobody, a detestable trickster who once played me false. At present I am not in the least concerned about him. I ignore him."

"That's good," Clyde answered. "I was afraid for a minute he might be someone."

"He is less than no one," I said.

"All right, pop. And now I'm going to rehearse

you in the lines and business of our second act, which will be played in that same store tomorrow morning before the banks open."

"I hope it may prove more exciting than the first act," I told him, somewhat languidly.

"Wait till you see," he rejoined. "If you don't say it's about the best two-acter ever written you can have my head for a football."

Back on the lot, however, the promised rehearsal was delayed while the confident Clyde did mysterious things with the tomatoes and the peaches. Fetching a pail of water to his tent he plunged both tins into it and left them there, directing me in the meantime to change back to my disguise as an actor, which, indeed, I thought it wise to do in case the reporting reptile should persist in his monstrous design of seeking further talk with me. Having resumed this flashy make-up I returned to Clyde and found him working with the tins. The gaudily printed labels had now been soaked loose from them and these he spread out smoothly on a board and placed in the sun. Yet he seemed to have accomplished nothing by his maneuver, for when the labels had dried he merely brought out a pot of paste and affixed them once more to the tins, using great care to have them precisely in place and smooth. So adept was he that presently he again had a tin of peaches and a tin of tomatoes, which was what he had started with, and I found myself staring at him in sheer bewilderment. The fellow must be playing some childish game, I thought.

And yet he was vastly serious as he now held out to me the tin of peaches and directed my attention to

a tiny scarring of the label about midway of the richly colored fruit there pictured.

"Get that little spot in your mind," he directed, "so you'd know that same can if you saw it in Egypt or some place."

"That is not difficult," I replied, still puzzled. "The defacement is minute but unmistakable. I could easily recognize this tin in Egypt, as you put it."

"Keno!" he explained. "And now comes the plot. Shut those tent flaps so we can rehearse in peace."

The next two hours revealed Clyde to me as a person of the most thorough methods. About the minutest details of the simple scene I was to enact on the morrow he was, in his coaching of me, conscientious to the last degree. Over and over I was obliged to repeat my few lines, with especial attention to the business, or pantomime. I was to have a scene with Mr. Ezra Marsh, the grocer, and in this Clyde took the grocer's part in a most lifelike manner. There was also to be a scene with Clyde himself, though this was rather difficult for me, since I was not to recognize him as Clyde, but to pretend that I thought him a drummer or traveling salesman.

Again and again we rehearsed in the hot closed tent, until my coach pronounced me letter-perfect. Yet he was not content with this and at every spare moment during the day he would insist on going over the lines or putting me through the simple pantomime. I saw how superficial Sooner Jackson had been in his rehearsals of me as Chief Ugwalalla. He had been content with a few careless directions; but here was an artist who would be satisfied with nothing less than perfec-

tion. I was glad to relax from the strain of these incessant rehearsals when the time came for the afternoon performance, although between that and the evening show I was again put through my paces.

The play of *East Lynne*, I may say, proved to be all that Mr. Reddick had promised, and I found myself profoundly affected by the gripping tragedy it unfolded. It was easy to believe that it had been a metropolitan success; easy, also, to believe that Mr. Reddick had brought out the original New York cast, for the acting of these people was capital. Vera quite surprised me by her gifts in the part of the too impressionable wife who in this drama falls a victim to the wiles of Sir Francis Levison, a despicable English nobleman utterly without principle, and my eyes were more than once moist in a terrifically heart-shaking scene where she returns in disguise to the home she has left, in order to be near her ailing child. No longer the wanton of the too-daring moonlight song, she was here finely the repentant wife and anguished mother, and I could not wonder that such powerful renditions had made her New York's favorite emotional actress.

My change to the actor's costume had been well advised. During an intermission while I stood chatting with Mr. Reddick at the door of the auditorium I was startled to see the journalist stalking about outside as if in seach of someone. Restraining my instinct for flight I saw his eyes flit blankly over me as he passed near. My disguise had served; this was no Meigs of the camera eye. Nor did I actually fear an encounter with the fellow; no longer could he harm me, for no longer did I assume the name of Simms.

The evening performance over, Clyde had a final word with me and gave me the stock of bank notes I would use in our act the next day. As the amount was considerable I suggested pinning the bills into my farm suit.

To this he delightedly agreed, applauding, "A good bit of business! Sure, we'll keep that in the skit—and I would never have thought of it!" Together we pinned bills into several pockets and Clyde declared that all was now in readiness for the morning show. "Put that coat under your pillow," was his final word as we said good night. "We don't want our most important prop lifted."

CHAPTER XVIII

AS ON the previous morning, Clyde and I were early at breakfast, I as eager as he, by this time, to enact my rigorously rehearsed rôle before an actual audience, and after a hurried meal I was once more driven to the side street some distance around the corner from the establishment of Mr. Ezra Marsh.

"I hate to ballyhoo myself, but watch my stuff get over," remarked Clyde as I descended with my basket, which contained the tin of peaches with the slightly defaced label concealed under a bunch of celery I had purchased the day before. "And don't go up in your lines," he added as I moved off.

Mr. Marsh was rearranging his scenery of fresh vegetables at the moment I entered, but at once wiped his hands and wished to be told my wants. "I would like," I explained, "two more tins of those peaches I purchased yesterday. I found them most luscious."

"That there brand is one of the best," he said, and passed behind his counter to a shelf from which he handed me the tins I asked for. These I placed in the basket and after a moment's mental effort, as if I sought to remember other desired articles, I said, "Oh, yes, and a pound of your best cheese."

"There ain't none better than this Eastern cheese of mine," he replied, and went to weigh out his comestible, adding, "That rain passed over us, after all."

I made no reply to this, remaining by the counter where I had first halted and being now engaged in rather absently shaking close to my ear a tin of peaches; not the one I had just received, but the tin with the faintly marked label. Mr. Marsh glanced at me as he wrapped the cheese in paper, but made no remark until he brought the tied package to place in my basket.

"Sounds good, hey?" he demanded, noting that I still listened to the gently shaken tin.

"It does sound good, my friend," I said coldly, "but it doesn't sound like peaches," and I handed it to him. "I am afraid I shall have to ask you to give me another in its place."

Somewhat mystified—and his professional pride a bit touched—he took the tin, shook it briskly near his own ear, looked carefully at the label and then curtly demanded, "Don't sound like peaches, hey? Well, it sounds like peaches to me, all right. You must be one of these here nuts, I guess. How did you expect a can of peaches to sound, anyway, for time's sake?"

"Like peaches," I dryly persisted, again taking the tin from him and listening while I shook it.

"Well, great suffering guns!" he exclaimed in his uncouth way. "I don't keep no music store. I don't guarantee to have my canned peaches sound any certain way."

"They should at least sound like peaches, though," I retorted, still listening.

The fellow was now showing a considerable irritation. "Well, if you're so smart, what do them peaches sound like?" he inquired with some truculence.

"Like tomatoes," I told him; whereupon Mr. Marsh burst into hearty laughter.

"Ho, ho! Sound like tomatoes, do they? Say, that's a good one, all right, all right! I s'pose you could tell the difference," he concluded with irony.

"Naturally, my dear man," I replied, "or I wouldn't be assuring you that this tin contains tomatoes instead of peaches."

"Ho, ho, ho!" he laughed again. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me——"

We were interrupted by Clyde, who stepped lightly into the shop bearing a case to make him resemble a traveling salesman. "Good morning, Mr. Marsh," he said at once, ignoring me. "I am representing the Helm products. Ah, I see a line of our goods on your shelf there. I hope they are giving satisfaction."

Mr. Marsh beamed whimsically upon the newcomer. "You're right in time," he said cordially. "Yes, your goods are giving first-rate satisfaction, but I just got a customer here that's trying to be funny about them." He gestured toward me with a blunt thumb.

"Why, how's this, how's this?" demanded the interested salesman.

"Oh, just a poor lunatic," explained Mr. Marsh. "He claims that can of peaches don't sound like peaches when he wiggles 'em up by his ear. Ain't that a good one? He claims they sound like tomatoes."

The salesman here indulged in a burst of the most convincing laughter, in which Mr. Marsh joined him, and then spoke to me.

"Come, come, my man, what is this about our peaches being tomatoes?"

"Simply," I said, extending the tin, "that although the label here says peaches the sound is that of tomatoes."

"Nonsense!" he retorted, frowning. "Such a mistake couldn't possibly happen at our establishment." He laughed again, though still frowning. "Tomatoes in a can labeled peaches! I should say not! I'll tell you, friend, just run home with your can of peaches and if they turn out to be tomatoes our firm will pay you one hundred dollars. That's fair, isn't it? Such a thing never has happened and never could happen."

"Just what I told the old nut," remarked Mr. Marsh.

"Nevertheless," I quietly insisted, "there are tomatoes and not peaches in this can."

The salesman now eyed me quizzically and, winking broadly at Mr. Marsh, suggested, "Come now, Silas, if you're so sure, how would you like to bet a small bit of change on it?"

"Willingly," I answered. "When I am reasonably positive I am always glad to place a small wager on my opinions."

And from a coat pocket I unpinned and brought out a roll of notes, and from a trousers pocket another roll, and still another from an inner waistcoat pocket. I was some moments engaged in this work and as the heap of money grew on the counter before me I observed that the eyes of Mr. Marsh began to glitter with a strange light.

"Say," he broke in, "if there's any betting just count me in, will you?" at the same time withdrawing a stout leather wallet from a pocket beneath his apron.

"All right, all right, Mr. Marsh," agreed the sales-

man. "Of course this man is rightly your meat because you found him first, but you ought to be fair, old top, and let me have a piece of him. Perhaps together we can teach him a lesson. The firm really wouldn't want talk of this kind going around. Hurt our products, you know." So saying he brought out some notes of his own and both men now looked questioningly at me as I counted my money.

"There's a hundred bucks," I said at last, "and I wish to bet them that this tin of so-called peaches is really tomatoes. I have still more money if you wish to wager more against me."

"I'll take it all," interposed the salesman quickly; but he was rebuffed by our grocer.

"No, sir. You said yourself he was my meat. I'll cover that hundred; then, for all I care, you can bet him as much more as the darned fool's got on him."

"Very well, very well, Mr. Marsh. I can't complain," the salesman assented. "I'll have to be content with what he has left over."

This, having unpinning two more pockets, I now saw to be forty dollars, and the stakes were neatly laid out, one hundred dollars from the grocer who was having this mad prank played upon him, and forty dollars from the pretended salesman.

"Now," said Mr. Marsh, "I'll just take this can into the back room and open her up and show this smarty he don't know everything." As he turned away the salesman shot a quick glance at me, whereat I remembered a cue I had forgotten, and spoke up severely.

"If it's just the same to you, sir, you open that tin right here in my presence."

"Ha, ha! I'm afraid old Silas is right," laughed the salesman.

"Oh, very well," agreed the now eager Mr. Marsh, his eyes gleaming newly each time they flitted over the heaps of currency. And from beneath his counter he withdrew a tin opener. Poising its point on the top of the upended tin he allowed himself to gloat briefly over the stakes, then struck the opener a sharp blow with his fist and vigorously began cutting the tin around its edge.

But as he worked, it seemed that his gnarled hand became stricken with a palsy; slower and slower went the cutting edge; Mr. Marsh paled visibly above his ragged beard as the forthright scent of tinned tomatoes ascended to his shocked and incredulous nostrils. It was not needed that he should pry back the circle of tin he had cut out, yet he did this automatically, as one dazed from a blow. His sense of orientation had become all at once seriously affected. He moved like a mechanism, his complicated reflexes being acted upon solely by the simplest of physiological stimuli. I am certain that when he raised the tin with its opened top and peered into the exposed mass of tomatoes his mind had entirely ceased to function, nor could he have been aware that he extended the thing to the salesman with the face of one who has heard a sentence of death passed upon him.

At a side look from Clyde I quickly swept the currency to one heap and stuffed it in a pocket. Then, taking my basket, I remarked, "I was positive they didn't sound like peaches," and turned away.

"Queerest thing I ever heard of," the salesman was

murmuring to the victim of our practical joke. "But don't worry, Mr. Marsh, I shall rush over to the telegraph office and let the house hear about this by wire. You can be sure they will make the loss good." Mr. Marsh, at my last glance, drooped above his counter, staring fixedly at the tin opener, which he slowly turned from side to side in his hand.

Clyde had been right about the little sketch. Now, and not until now, did I perceive why he had soaked those labels off. True, he had replaced them, but the rogue had not replaced them on the same tins. I saw it all now. Back yonder in the tent we had a tin of peaches falsely emblazoned with a monster tomato of ripe perfection. Who, I wondered, would be the next grocer to have this mad prank played upon him? Someone of the ilk, not above winning the money of a seeming poor hick, would confidently open that tin only to be stricken by the discovery of peaches where, by all sound dependable laws of trade, tomatoes should be.

I placed my basket in the car and even as this was done I heard the rapid footsteps of Clyde approaching. Flushed with triumph I turned to be met by the ingenious fellow's hearty congratulations.

"Pop, I'll have to mitt you!" he exclaimed as he wrung my hand. "You open cold and give a wonderful performance."

"Your own part was splendidly acted," I hastened to assure this generous critic.

"Author, author!" he whimsically cried, and bowed to imaginary plaudits. "You know, pop, I'm simply wasted at a piano. I've always said so."

"Here is the kale." And I handed him the immense quantity of notes I had won.

He took them and, abstracting a bill which I saw to be for twenty bucks, pressed it upon me, saying, "That's your percentage of the gross."

"Really," I protested, "I don't feel that I have fairly earned so large a sum." But he silenced me with a sweeping gesture, declaring, "You earned your bit, pop—and let's not stick around this corner too long. Good old Ezra hadn't really got his bearings yet when I left to wire the house about their carelessness, but he may come to, any minute and scream bloody murder." With this he drove on up the street and turned another corner.

Remembering the falsely labeled tin we still possessed I was now all eagerness to play my part again, such was the hold it had taken upon my histrionic longings. Clyde, it seems, had considered the matter.

"This town ain't as big as it should be," he observed critically, "but at that I guess it ought to be good for two shows—if we pull the other one quick. In about an hour from now Ezra will know he's been stung, but he'll probably be too ashamed to spread it around. I noticed a dive down here at the other end that looked good for a turn."

He halted the car in another side street and emptied my basket of the cheese and celery. The cheese, I suddenly reflected, had not been paid for. I had actually defrauded the grocer of it. But I felt that this would be hardly the moment to return. Far better would it be to send the fellow his money by mail. Clyde was now directing me.

"This dive is two doors up on your right from this next corner, with a lot of berries and green stuff out in front. The come-on is short and fat with a red face. Do the first act like you did yesterday. Get a couple of cans of stuff and tell him it looks like rain. Then say there was something else you wanted to get but you've forgotten what it was and you'll be back this afternoon when you remember. We'd better not wait any longer than this afternoon, because the Gaspard back there might be a gossip, at that. We'll simply do two a day in this town."

Once more, then, I entered the shop of a greengrocer in my casual manner. The egg we were now to sting was, as Clyde had described him, short and bulky, with a high voice and a rather nervous manner. His face was almost too red and I could not but wonder if his heart were sound. It seemed to me that the shock in store for him might prove alarmingly serious to one of his full habit. However, I made my few purchases and chatted a moment with him, finding him affable but ready to be unduly excited, even about the weather, which had much displeased him of late.

"It's annoying," I said on leaving, "to have forgotten some other items I needed, but I shall return this afternoon without fail." And the poor yap smiled and rubbed his too fat hands at me as I left.

It is proper to admit at this point, I believe, that among my always to be baffled curiosities is the precise manner in which this evidently overnerved organism would have reacted to the catastrophe then seeming so inexorably to impend. It is a taste for morbid psychology, I presume, but in this instance promising to

be made doubly piquant by certain physical complications all too eloquently threatened. The chap's blood pressure must already have been over the normal and his emotional balance was obviously unstable. He would undoubtedly have afforded an instructive interplay of the physical and mental, and from that high moment—how swiftly fleeting!—of my own security I looked forward to our later meeting with something akin to fascination. Once more I had attained a normal elation. My spirit bounded exultantly where, before the achievement of this new triumph, it had groped in depths of cold despondency.

Dashed fool that I was, I had not the wit to reflect that this mountain summit of rejoicing would inevitably mean a compensating abyss. I should have known—but did not—that fate had a way of leading me to dizzy heights, then, while I lost myself in admiration of the view, lightly pushing me over an edge. At this moment I had never been so free of misgiving, never so confident of unbroken felicity in the way of life I had chosen. Yet the stimulation I felt was from an intoxicant whose ferment was all too volatile.

Humming lightly, my valuable basket on my arm, I went around the corner to our car. "The first act went off smoothly," I reported to Clyde as I took my seat. "But this come-along is a vastly different type from the other. I dare say——" I stopped, hearing rapid footsteps as of someone running to our car.

"Mr. Simms, Mr. Simms! One moment, Mr. Simms!" I glanced around again to see the slimy news reporter who had so impudently accosted me the day before.

Even now my spirit was so lifted I felt more than

a hot irritation. "Be off with you, fellow!" I cried, and found myself wishing I had a stout cudgel at hand with which I might give such a rascal the good drubbing he richly deserved.

Seeing that I meant to rebuff him he continued rapidly on past our car, which was now in motion, quickening his pace to a fleet run, and calling loudly to someone beyond him. As we improved our own speed I saw the figures of two men turn at his hail and stand to await him. We were now abreast of them and though they had not yet regarded me, their eyes being still on the approaching reporter, I was once more plunged into a yawning abyss. These two men were the weak-chinned busybody, Hemingway, and the preposterous Bertrand Meigs.

"Drive like mad!" I gasped, and Clyde increased our speed.

"Is it them?" he demanded.

"All of them," I replied dully. My erstwhile buoyance had gone. I seemed to know as well then as later that Fairwater had clutched me. Yet I ignored the certainty, something stubborn within me still fighting. "The h—l hounds are closing in on me," I muttered, my mouth dry, "but I shall yet lead them a stern chase."

"Of course you will, pop," Clyde cheered me as he skilfully evaded traffic and brought us beyond the town's edge.

"I shall keep on rising my opponents as if I had the winning hand," I persisted.

"I got it," said Clyde, turning to the side road that led to our show lot. "I'll stop and tell Vera and get

a few things, then you and I will jump the show. Just like that. We got a superior attraction anyway—a sure-fire hit in any of these towns. Trust old Clyde and he'll have you hard to catch in no time."

I recalled Irene's description of the light-minded youth as a bird of aquatic habits. He truly was, it appeared, and once more I might be taken swiftly beyond the pursuit of fulsome meddlers. I felt a little cheered—yet, always beneath, was that looming black conviction that the game was up. It was not, I saw now, that I could not elude those who harried me; it was that some inner fire of mine had died out, leaving but a smolder of despair.

Yet at the Reddick lot a new shock was in store for me, and one that a little revived my primitive ardor. Quickly descending from the car to wait within the tent while Clyde should conclude his arrangements for our flight, the booming notes of a familiar and long-missed voice fell upon my ears. Only half believing, I peered cautiously around a flap of the canvas and beheld the widespread ringlets of Sooner Jackson gently stir in the breeze as he stood with his hat off in talk with Vera. She, I observed, held in her hand several vials of our Sheik-Lure, and at the moment she was saying, "Really, you'd never believe how hard it is to get a good permanent wave out here in the sticks."

"You'd ought to see some of these beauty-parlor dames give me the icy eye when I go in for a hot oil shampoo," was the sympathetic reply.

"Sooner!" I breathlessly called, and my friend's saturnine face lighted rather wonderfully as he turned to behold me.

"Well, you poor old Roquefort! Of all the——" He broke off in a sudden thwarting realization that a lady was among his listeners.

"There's not a moment to be lost," I said. "I have just been discovered in yonder hick village." Vera glanced up in quick concern from where Clyde was now explaining our plight.

Sooner Jackson remained his cool self, and never had he more finely revealed a talent for leadership. He listened in silence while both Clyde and I acquainted him with the details of our encounter with the fiends. Fully informed he said at once, "Then they'll be here with hot feet."

On this he studied his own car, which had halted at a little distance. In the front of this sat the so-called Indian, old George Cook, listlessly indifferent to my peril. After a moment's survey my friend seized my arm and propelled me to the car, saying, "Get a move on! Work fast and don't let the act flop."

So quickly did he work, himself, that almost before I could divine his intention he had me secreted at the bottom of the tonneau under a burden of canvas, blankets and bags that promised to crush me as if I were an insect. I was cramped, a bag with sharp corners gored my side quite agonizingly, and it seemed that I should be able to breathe there but a few moments. Yet when I protested in faint tones my friend merely replied, "Close the mush!" and left me there to smother had I not by a series of the most difficult contortions succeeded in bringing my face to where an ill-fitting door let me have a bit of air.

Scarce had I drawn my first full breath when I heard

another car come up and stop near by, after which I could plainly distinguish the voices of Meigs and the reporter in voluble talk. Sooner Jackson, meanwhile, had engaged Clyde in a low-toned conversation as he stood beside the car. I had been unable to catch any words, but now the voices of both were raised.

"Yes, Kansas City," I heard Clyde say. "I dropped him at the depot on my way here and he caught the 10:30 just as she pulled out. He'll be sorry he missed you."

"Well, I'm sorry too," replied Sooner. "Don't it beat the dickens!" he continued in tones of deep impatience. "After all the trouble I've had to find that man, then I miss him by just a hair's breadth, you might say. Do you know where he is going to stop in Kansas City?"

"No," answered Clyde. "And he isn't going to stop long, either. He's going on to New Orleans."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Sooner in loud tones of regret. "That's just my luck. And I had an important message to give him. Now I bet I don't get sight of him for another three months. Well, much obliged for the information, anyway. And I'll have to be getting on. I'm going to K. C. myself—but of course I'll get there just in plenty time to miss him."

"Too bad," Clyde said sympathetically. "I tried to keep him over, but he suddenly got into an awful hurry about something or other and wouldn't listen to me."

On this I felt the little jolt of Sooner entering the car, and heard him, still loudly, inquire the road to Kansas City. Good-bys were then said, in which Vera

joined. "Tell my old pal if you do see him," she urged Sooner, "that I shall miss him a lot."

Then we got slowly into motion, at first backing, then going forward with a jerk that discommoded me, after which we again backed, so that I was beginning to feel a nausea. But at last we moved steadily forward and I could feel that our speed increased momentarily.

I had no way of knowing how long my confinement lasted and I became more and more irked by my cramped position and the weight of objects carelessly thrown over me with not the least system. Could it be possible, I wondered, that Sooner had forgotten all about me? Yet when I had decided to endure the imprisonment no longer and to open the *mush* again I became aware that the car halted, and presently felt the weight above me being lightened. Freed, finally, I raised myself and saw us to have paused between spreading green fields from which our town could be dimly descried in the hazy distance.

"Ain't I some little body-snatcher?" demanded Sooner as he warmly shook my hand.

CHAPTER XIX

WE PUT George—the poor old sturgeon had never looked less an Indian—into the rear seat while I sat beside Sooner, who now informed me, though jokingly, I believe, that his real name was Barnaby Oldham and that if I didn't believe it I was to watch him burn up the miles. And he did speed swiftly from the neighborhood of those who conspired against me, although not too swiftly for the talk we needed to have.

"I been combing three counties for you," he petulantly complained. "Not that I blamed you after I had a chat with that lady conversationalist I left you with. Between the two of you, you certainly dutched up that layout, what with your sour old Simms prattle and her being a manhandler. You had a license to skitter along, but why in Pete's name couldn't you leave me word where to find you? I wrote you I was coming."

"Yes," I protested, "but your letter was delayed. I read it only last Saturday evening, and that same night our man walked into that tent where I was doing Moo-woo with the Burke Carnival——"

"You must have been good," he interrupted. "And I had to miss it! Oh, well, I guess I already had my share of laughs. Probably this one wasn't coming to me. Anyway, that's where I cut your trail. Your lady friend back at the auto camp said she last saw

you there, so I chased the Burke outfit, thinking someone would find you and knowing anyone that did would keep you—you being just that good. I fell in with the frail that runs a meat joint and she told me all about your doings with them and how she shifted you to Reddick's show and how you are going under a new Elias which is Hector something or other. That was one happy surprise. I expected this time you'd make up a good name like Jesse James or John G. Vanderbilt or something—you're just that cunning.

"Anyway it was Sunday I met this Hamburg frail and got her to loosen up about you; I'd have been here yesterday if I hadn't seen your old Fairweather pal on the lot. Him and a ratty old fuss-budget that has also begun to chase you, was going into every snare, thinking you might be the snake eater or something. Of course they'd first tried to con the frail into telling about you. But not her! She didn't know a thing except you'd gone to Omaha, and she blurted that out before she thought, being just a babe in arms. But I want to tell you, Al, those boys are getting so they don't believe half what they hear about your routes. When they couldn't find you on the lot they begun to watch me. The rest of the day we was both stalling. Then yesterday morning your dear old college friend gets a long-distance and they beat it some place and I beat it here—and it seems like this was the place they beat it for too. And if you want to know who steered 'em over here, it was that newspaper pup that was also helping to run you down. I had a talk with him at seven A.M. this morning and he told me so. I put him wise on one thing, though. I told him your right

name was Charlie Ross. So now, old pal, that's all. How you feeling, otherwise?"

As he talked I had been marveling at the man's genius for misusing words. The Hamburger Queen a frail! Aroused from this musing, I thought it best to confess that courage had left me.

"Sooner, old fish," I put it simply, "I'm down. My gay banner of daring trails in the dust."

"You don't mean you're licked?" he demanded in surprise.

"My state could not be better described."

"Nonsense!" Perilously he took a hand from the wheel to thump my back. "Don't talk silly, Al. I'll bet you my share of the week's takings we never set eyes on any one of those junipers again."

"Sooner," I said, "I'll have to tell you something—I'm married."

He turned beaming eyes upon me. "Why, you sly old cutie! Who'd have thought it? That comes from letting you out of sight. Who's the lady?"

"You don't understand," I said. "I've been married for thirty years."

At once the good chap's manner changed. In a voice vibrating with sympathy he said, "Well, now, I'm certainly sorry to hear that, old man. We all have our troubles, don't we? And you kept it all to yourself like the game little rascal you are! Well, well! I never give you the right credit, old scout. My goodness me!"

"I wonder if you can realize——" I began, but he hushed me.

"Man, man, you bet I can realize! Don't hurt all

your finer instincts by trying to tell me. Old Sooner Jackson ain't always been a carefree mocking-bird screeching his happy way through the treetops. Don't you think it. But listen, pal, maybe something can be done about it. Now I knew a case where the parties——"

And for many miles my friend regaled me with stormy domestic histories which had been brought to a happy termination by one means or another; some fair, some foul; all submitted without prejudice.

As he talked on I had not the heart to let him see how powerless he was to renew in me the rapturous valors of our early association. He was too ingenuously confident that by this show of determined cheerfulness he must perforce raise me to my former reckless fervency. From time to time, while he selected some new memoir with which to revive my fainted ardor, he would steal furtive, troubled glances at me as if to note what success he might be having.

The pathos of these stolen looks prevailed. Compassionately I feigned to be again my old buoyant self. I let him believe that a domestic inharmony had alone depressed me. It would have been too cruel, nor was this the moment to tell him that a new knowledge of myself had sufficed to bring about the spiritual collapse he so shrewdly observed. It would take time and a thoughtful choice of words to convey to him that my lost hardihood was irrecoverable not because I was married but because I was I—invincibly I, beyond reparation or relief.

So, then, I strove for a gayety to match my friend's own, and was repaid for the subterfuge when I ob-

served that his glances at me were no longer troubled.

"That is a boy!" he applauded, when I had with some animation told him of my success in the part of Moowoo and of my consternation when faced by Meigs at the very pinnacle of my triumph.

"And I have to hand it to that dish-faced little brute," he went on, "every time I think of him. Say what you will, he's got a world of gimp. I bet if his folks had only started him at something useful he'd have made good. Look at the way he's kept tabs on us. Pays no attention when told that a party has left for Canada. Look at the way he got right back here after me leaving him up in the air a thousand miles away. 'We never sleep' is sure that onion's house flag."

I was conscience-smitten at this. Too well I knew that it was nothing but my own senseless babble to Hemingway that had provided the clew for Meigs and undone all the devoted strategy of my friend. Again I was struck by the seeming airiness with which mere chance will so radically alter the very fabric of our destiny: My arrival—upon a common open road—in Mrs. Gale's car at the precise instant to bring me in conjunction with Hemingway's. I pictured our two courses that fatal morning. Five seconds' delay by either of us and we had passed safely oblivious of each other. Some remark by Mrs. Gale might have detained me; or the doddering Hemingway might have had trouble in starting his car. In that case Meigs would unquestionably now be lost in Canadian wilds. Yet with an uncanny accuracy chance had calculated our orbits for that fateful meeting. Or was it chance?

Again I could not evade the conviction—it had been because I was I—terribly I.

Summoning a new vivacity I then told Sooner of the splendid work I had done in Clyde's sketch that morning, of the other show we had planned for the afternoon, and of my lively suspicion that the second man—he of the too-high blood pressure—might not be able to take a joke in the right spirit. I had not often impressed Sooner Jackson and I found myself keenly relishing the attention he paid this recital.

"Goody, goody!" he exclaimed when I finished. "That there is certainly one sweet little sketch to remember during the long winter evenings. And me thinking I had seen positively all the shows! Well, well, civilization is getting on, no matter what the papers say. That boy, Clyde, ought to be a well-known banker or something. You know, that stuff is so good I ain't any too darned sure he wouldn't have had old Sooner Jackson's pelt hung up—that is, me being by some horrible chance in the grocery business. Go on, give us some *morcé* good ones, you poisonous old cut-up!"

I found myself then with an impulse to tell him of all I had found Irene to be, but this I resisted, divining that he would not understand. I did tell him that I had found her witty and wise; I quoted her "They make me laugh—what's it all for?"—pointing out that this demand, intelligently put, tops the ultimate peak of philosophic inquiry, being ever ahead to baffle the most daring climber.

Sooner admitted that the frail [!] had some good patter, but it was plain to me that she had not to him

seemed lovely and wonderful. Vera, on the other hand, he warmly commended after I had told him of her versatility, she being not only America's Queen of Jazz but New York's favorite emotional actress.

"That skirt," he remarked, "ought to be making a home for someone that would stay there, a nice little nest with rugs and different-colored pictures and all the latest records and some good books costing four or five dollars each and a garage and a good delicatessen near by and some fancywork and so forth. But she ain't got a Chinaman's chance. She'll be in luck to keep a fur coat and a mesh bag she can have dipped now and then when the plate wears off, to make a front with. It's tough for a gal to be too good for the tents and not good enough for the hall shows. I've seen 'em at all stages from soda to hock. Sometimes I've wondered like your fat friend—what's it all for? Well, I guess we know as much about that as anyone, Al."

"Unfortunately we do," I agreed.

"But if you found out what this was all for, you'd only be asking something else," he summed up shrewdly. "Don't I know the human race from alphabet to eureka?"

"Better than many of even greater pretensions," I heartily assented.

"That is a boy!" he again applauded. "He's all cheered up again. The roses are coming back to the wan cheeks; pretty soon the nice old doctor will let him go out in the park and count the grass."

With such idle talk we whiled away the hours as we flashed across a landscape checkered with green mead-

ows and fields of ripened grain, where cattle grazed or reclined, fatly superior to the foment of human existence, or where the farm hicks toiled at their business of harvesting hay and other useful products. Straight into the west our dusty gray road led us. And assuredly beyond, though yet invisible, were those Rocky Mountains whose noble crags had so long beckoned me on, but which, it now seemed probable, I should never have the thrill of beholding. I was, I at last knew, unworthy to view their grandeur. Yet nothing of this did I allow to reach my now rejoicing companion. For his sake I was again the insouciant vagabond who fed him on a park bench—eons ago, it truly seemed.

By mid-afternoon we had gone a hundred miles, and at a town set in the flat land we stopped for food. Oddly enough I found myself surveying its main street with a professional eye. Yonder was the tiny square by the drinking fountain where our car would halt. Lounging before a Business Men's Soft Drink Parlor was the metal-starred person whose hand Sooner would presently clasp to such good purpose. I saw our lights burst into splendor, heard the preliminary tinkle of the banjo and saw the street idlers converge upon us with their characteristic animation.

All at once I felt the old flair for magical and romantic things surge unreasonably above my still insistent premonition that these days with Sooner were numbered. I longed to fling myself again into the part of the aged chieftain. I even fell to a meanness of exulting at the discomfiture of poor old George when he should see how the part could be played by one with gifts for it.

As we were about to leave I delighted Sooner by saying, "Old beans, this town would skin incomparably. We would sit down pretty. Observe the fine heads to be added as trophies to your famous collection. We are in the midst of a choice herd so innocent it doesn't suspect the hunter's presence. What say you, old sap, if we pull an entertainment on the bums?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" he heartily laughed as he shook back his curls. "It certainly does cheer me, comrade, to hear some of your old stuff again. After all, old songs are the best. But jesting apart," the good chap became serious, "we might just as well do another fifty miles. Those three birds back there stood with their mouths open like catfish when I pulled out, and it's a cinch bet they are now chasing me to K. C. But—also—they may have watched me turn back, though I couldn't see a soul and the road was straight for two miles. Anyway, we got the time, so let's play safe and get a better lead. And we can hit a better town than this too. I ain't worked it since three years ago when I had a line of genuine Labrador diamonds smuggled straight from the mines—that town looked like a crystal maze when I pulled out. And a mile this side is the prettiest camping place you'd ever want."

To this suggestion I heartily agreed, and we resumed our mad race across the peaceful farmlands. Could it be possible, after all, I wondered, that I was now at last free from the clutching hand of Fairwater? Such a release seemed plausible, yet I continued only too conscious of a dull certainty persisting under this genial surface ripple.

We reached our camping place at five o'clock and

found it all that Sooner had promised. On the grassy bank of a still-running brook, secluded from the highway by a clump of low-growing trees, we set up our home for the night. While Sooner, with awkward help from old George, who had swinishly slept away the golden hours among the luggage in the tonneau, set about the preparation for our evening meal, I lost no time in resuming the splendid garb of Chief Ugwalalla. Almost at once my spirits rose, and when I adjusted the war bonnet that lurking black fear vanished—for a moment, I almost believed, forever.

I strutted in my plumes, secretly daring Fate again to thwart me. I even descended to the game of shooting at dice with George when I noted him in solitary play with a pair. "Fade out my works!" I cried, tossing some coins to the ground before him, and nothing loth the dull fellow put down a like amount. Not unprofitably had I studied the mechanics of this sport on the Burke lot, nor had I neglected to memorize the queer exhortations that accompany it. Easily winning my first wager, for George proved to have no skill with the hazard cubes, as they are often described, I took them into my own hand, exclaiming, "Shoot the entire work!" whereupon the unfortunate fish brought out more money.

"I am throwing financial depression," I fairly warned him. And I must have mastered the trick, for at the first cast I achieved a five and a four and at the second, crying "Nine from Decatur, here is where I buy some new shoes!" I unerringly threw a six and a three, thus winning the rubber.

Poor old George explored his pocket for other coins,

finding but two small ones, which I also won. "So that cleanses you!" I jeered, smiling at the troubled look with which he again searched the various pockets of a suit I only now recognized as the one I had worn before changing to my rustic disguise. And what was my surprise—as well as the surprise of old George—when he by chance came upon that reserve five-spot which had been pinned in a pocket long ago. The expression of bewilderment on his bum map was ludicrous in the extreme and so exultant my mood I forbore to claim the note as my own.

"Shoot at all the works," I again urged. He, the paltry-minded sturgeon, insisted at first that he would shoot at but one dollar, but I sneered openly at him and demanded the full five, which he at length reluctantly staked. And again I conquered with ease, after scarce a struggle. I was, it seemed, invincible, and poor old George slunk away after an attempt to be jaunty with the speech, "Easy come, easy go!" My gayety now increased and Sooner did not again have cause to complain that I seemed downcast. The omens had all been in my favor.

George confessed to Sooner the games of dice he had lost to me. "He even took five dollars I'd saved up and didn't know it," he complained.

"I certainly bobbed his bank roll," I laughingly boasted.

"You want to look out for that baby bandit from now on," was Sooner's admiring comment. "He's liable to put us both sidewise."

An hour later we were at our station, and with delight I saw our crowd assemble under the magic of

Sooner's music. Never, I felt, had either of us been in better form than at this first performance after our auspicious reunion. Sooner's feats with his manikins had never seemed so amusing; more than once I was like to forget that his was a tongue unknown to the venerable chieftain in the rear of the car; especially when the Irish Patrick, even after being placed in his box so that black Sambo could sing, repeatedly pushed its lid up in the most unruly manner, hurling new insults at the poor black until Sooner at length had to hold down the lid by placing a foot sternly upon it. After the rich whimsey of this, small wonder I was able to enact my own part with a verve and finish I had never surpassed.

My Vedic hymn I gave with a new passion and it put upon my audience what was practically a spell. Not a sound was there to distract me until at the close came a burst of rather raffish laughter from across the way. I glanced in the direction of this annoyance in my old alarm; so did Sooner; but we were both relieved to observe that the offender was no one we knew. He was a large man, at least twice the size of Meigs, and would be, I guessed, one of the town's better-class yaps who chose to be amused at a distance by our artistry. He continued to stand where I had noticed him, in the shadow of a doorway, a soft hat shadowing his face; once, as he moved slightly, some troubling dart of remembrance pricked me. Even in the barely perceptible shift of his huge body there had been something faintly reminiscent. But he did not again offend with his boorish guffaw, so I at length forgot him.

Nor did my attention revert to him until the moment of my medicine dance when, although I stepped the

measure with more, I am sure, than my former fire, I again heard his raucous mirth. At first, I thought, he made an effort to subdue this, conscious that he was being grossly discourteous, but as I finished the dance and returned to my seat he seemed to lose all control of his decenter self and gave his lowest impulses free play. So heartily did he roar that more than one of the crowd tittered in sympathy. A final shrill crescendo bordered on the hysterical; the helpless man began to beat his sides with both hands as if in further relief of his emotion.

And with that all-too-familiar gesture Fairwater shut its merciless jaws upon me. I had sung my swan song, and knew it. Yet I was queerly unflurried. Not only cool but chilled.

"You certainly have one friend in the house," said Sooner to me in an undertone.

"He has meant to be," I calmly replied, and the sale of our wares continued without further interruption.

When at last our lights were out, the play done, and Sooner was occupied in storing his stuff for our departure I said to him, still calmly, "I must speak to that gentleman before we go." With this I left the car and, drawing my poor gay blanket close about me, I advanced across the street, while the shadowed figure stepped a little forward in expectancy. As I came within hailing distance he, after a glance about to see that we were secluded, burst into detestably florid speech.

"Bless me! The long-wandering, much-enduring Odysseus returns as a beggarly old man. Yet Penelope will recognize him, for this guise is but the work of

Athene's wand. In all the ninety cities of Crete have we sought him——”

“Fargus!” I expostulated, but the smug rascal continued as I came to a halt before him.

“Marred by many ills, he has yet survived Cyclops, Calypso and the Phæacians, Circe, the Sirens, Scylla, all manner of *speciosa miracula*—even a conjectural Aphrodite——”

This was too much. Fairwater had indeed closed upon me, but I was not the submissive weakling she had sought. “Cut away from the rough stuff, you poor sap!” I rudely cried, then demanded, “Is the creature, Meigs, by any chance, one of your little band?”

“Happily no,” he replied. “That faithful soul and monumental pest is now, thank God, on his way to Kansas City. I had a wire from him an hour ago.”

“Very well, then,” I said severely. “In that case I will treat with you. You must see I no longer resist. Is there by any chance a train leaving here tomorrow morning for Fairwater?”

“One does wander off at ten o'clock in the general direction of our town.”

“Quite so. I will be there on the hour if you won't object to a very roughly attired traveling companion. I do not mean that I must go in my present outfit, but the only other I have——”

He laughed softly and the light from a neighboring street lamp showed him to be regarding me with admiring and unmistakably envious eyes. “Believe me, old man, I should be only too proud to go back with you in this splendid scenic investiture, or even in the probably less regal garments you speak of. But luckily I

have at yonder inn a bag containing apparel of your own which I was persuaded to carry for just this emergency. If you will come there now——”

“So,” I interrupted bitterly, “you counted your victory won. Yet I will not go now. I must leave you for one more wild night in the open. But I shall be at the hotel tomorrow at nine, which will give me ample time to change.”

“You mean it?” he asked, his tone half-doubting.

“You should read me better than that,” I retorted coldly.

Again I caught the admiring, the envious glance. “Coppie, I feel humiliated in my present position. Who am I to break a butterfly on the wheel? And you, you have made history. I never dreamed you had it in you. Between you and me, old man, I’ve often wanted to do the same thing. But the Rubicon always runs bank-full, the current is swift, the water icy——”

“You poor old pickerel, I’m sorry for you,” I said. “But I must be off. Tomorrow at nine, then.” And with this I left Fargus Jessup, who might, but never would, show himself in his true colors as I had done.

“Nothing wrong?” asked Sooner sharply when I reached the waiting car.

“Nothing can ever be wrong with me again,” I said. “I have learned a truth that armors me stoutly.”

“That is a boy!” he cheered me, all unsuspecting. A moment later we had driven away from the town and my cheeks were fanned by a soft night breeze from that west where the Rocky Mountains must forever vainly await me.

CHAPTER XX

BEFORE our camp blaze I sat hunched on my blankets, piqued anew at the froth of trifles by which destiny holds us to the rigors of our appointed way. Had I not wished to halt at a town fifty miles from where Fargus Jessup chanced [?] to be? Stopping there, we should by another night have been still farther from him, while the rest of his band searched the barren ways of distant Kansas City.

Yet this would have been thwarting destiny—which is unthinkable. What was undoubtedly a wise piece of caution on Sooner's part had been used to confound me; a device of the filmiest weave, yet as brutally unerring, as savagely ponderous in reality, as one of those tremendous steam hammers nicely descending upon hot metal in certain shops where large objects are manufactured.

Beyond the light of our fire lay the impoverished and dismal George in troubled sleep. Sooner now placed his own blankets near mine and lighted one of his rudely fashioned cigarettes, chuckling to himself the while; overflowing with a merry zest for our new future together. But, as we sat in a fitfully wavering light that drove back the encroaching shadows, mine must be the thankless part to distress the good sap once more and finally. So cheered was he, however, I felt loth to begin, and for a time we remained with only the snapping of

our fire of faggots and the faint chirping of disturbed insects to break the silence. Finally I felt that I, too, should smoke, and I got the Indian pipe, filled it from Sooner's absently proffered pouch and drew in a choking breath of the stuff to nerve me.

"You and I shall have a tobacconalia, old eggs," I at last said, and, then, believing it cruel to cut a dog's tail off a bit at a time, as I had once read in a pungent anecdote, I went quickly on, "I am glad you didn't give old George a gate when I reappeared. You will need his scarred pan tomorrow night. You'll open the show as usual, Sooner, but your yaps will have to put up with old George, because a far better chieftain—if I do say it—will be traveling straight away from the famed Rocky Mountains. Probably I shall never see them. I am not worthy to see them. I am only a poor toy balloon that tugged frantically enough till its thread broke. I did float for a while, but my fabric was too frail. I've collapsed. I am licked, Sooner."

He had glanced quickly at me, mystified, and now began a sputtering expostulation after his manner earlier in the day, yet I am sure he detected that some pall had fallen beyond even his power to lift. With a sudden cooling of tone, as one facing what he sees must be faced, he quietly asked, "Are you signing off?"

"I simply must," I told him. "For a week I have known I must. There came moments when I could make myself forget, but—underneath—I've known all too well."

"A man can't kid himself forever," he dryly submitted.

"You may have known that simple truth a long

time," I said, "but it comes to me only now. Sitting here I have discovered that kidding others must be frequently a matter of policy; at least there are times when its ethical significance is debatable. But to kid ourselves, old juniper—that seems to be an offense against the first of moral laws. Written above them all must be, 'Thou shalt not kid thyself!' We deceive others perhaps wisely, perhaps charitably; often, certainly, without punishment. But when we fool ourselves we pay for it. No one ever escaped the penalty. I haven't."

"As how?" he demanded. "You seem to get yourself, but I'm blamed if I get you."

"I want you to get me, though," I persisted. "Perhaps I can make it plainer. In the first place I am not quite normal. Instead of being consistently satisfied with the well-ordered life that was—quite inalienably—mine, I had moods of the queerest impatience in which I longed to get away from it all. I oddly thirsted for strange excitements; also a peace that would be strange and new. I wished to be free from certain vexations become all too familiar. I was goaded to wish myself someone else in another sort of life. And I was ingenuous enough to believe I needed only to change my name and my environment. I did shift them—I still believe, with some brilliance of planning. Then I found these were but the merest surface alterations. Under the skin I remained wretchedly what I had been. I might call myself Simms or another, but I was still I—terribly I. Of course in the first novelty of it I did fool myself for a time—rare fooling it was, too—but the old true self was always there, pricking, muttering,

warning, and, at last, demanding. We are bound to the rack of ourselves, Sooner, riveted unalterably there. And I'll tell you something else, old friend—this is the only hell that has been proved, up to date. It's hell enough too."

A long moment Sooner continued, staring into the little leaping flames, nodding to himself, muttering fragments of words. Then he spoke. "I guess I do get you, Al. A tame goldfish, that's what you were, in one of these here bowls in a parlor, with a little stone castle to swim in and out of and around and around. And you got tired of the scenery so you flopped out and run off to be a wild trout in a regular crick. Then you find you're still a hundred per cent goldfish. How about it?"

"Old sap, you put it better than I did," I eagerly told him. "That is because my own poor brain has been channeled by certain conventional and quite faultless book phrases that are yet inferior to the real gazukus. I am helplessly I, even when I speak. I am too ashamed to tell you the details, but our pursuers have netted me so smartly, after all the distance you beguiled Meigs, only because of that disability. I had to be myself either with Hemingway or anyone else. Soon or late I should have run into another car. It didn't have to be Hemingway's—and it wasn't chance. I had to lug my old self on my back."

Sooner lighted another cigarette and pulled at it meditatively for a time before he spoke. Quite astonishingly smoke would pour in great volume from his nostrils long after I thought he must have expelled it all. "I see you got this old self's mind made up, Al,"

he at length said, "and I'm not one to chew things over against a set mind. But, just the same, we could still outdistance that gangle-eyed gollop with the flag."

"But no!" I cried. "For long I fed myself on that illusion. Each time we escaped I would say, 'At last everything is Jacob!' But it's no use, old fish. We could never outdistance that gulp because, don't you see, he is actually my real self. He might take other forms. He did tonight. He took the form of one you saw me speak with—that man who forgot himself in so gauche an outbreak back there. Meigs isn't to blame. It's not his fault that he's a symbol—a projection—of my real self. In one form or another he was bound to drag me back."

"Say"—Sooner glanced brightly around at me as if illumined—"it's a rotten case of Jekyll and Hyde, ain't it. You're Hyde, running off to be hellish, and he's old Doc Jekyll preventing you."

"I dare say," I allowed, "though I am not familiar with the instance."

"Just a movie I saw," he explained. "They're both the same man, only this Doc Jekyll is a goldfish and well-behaved till he takes to being Hyde, and then he's one nasty trout, let me tell you. Any crick he swum in had its troubles till the Doc got another toehold on him."

"Well put for my poor case," I applauded. "And why should I try to be a wild fish? Yet I am not wholly unique. That man tonight, an old friend, is also not normal. He confessed it. He has often wished to get away from it all. I suppose I should have warned him. Environment is plastic enough, easily kneaded, but he

could never be free from his relentless self. His own Meigs, his chance Doctor Hemingway—his Doctor Hyde, as you say—would dog him to a final surrender, even in some far Cathay. True, Fargus might kid himself longer than I did. The spirit of wine often sings in his glass and at times he will captain ‘an army of shining and generous dreams,’ but soon or late he would be inexorably haled back to his tame and proper bowl. It’s the sternest law that conditions humanity, old friend.”

Again Sooner smoked a long time in silence, and rather savagely it seemed to me. Then he suddenly demanded, “Say, what’s it all for, anyhow—like that burly wench back there was always wanting to know?”

“As you pointed out yourself this afternoon,” I said, “no conceivable answer would satisfy us. And that’s how we know we all are really gods, old scouter—nothing could ever satisfy us. If there be superior gods above us you can wager better than track odds they are putting the same query to the gods still above them. The same cry must be going on and on to the ultimate gods or until you tire of following it—what’s it all for?”

“Well, it’s for you to prate to the rabble and me in my bowl to sell my own particular Aga-Jac, and both of us to manage our ordained works in the manner most pleasing to us. We must contrive to find the least painful position on our racks. Beyond that, we know as much now what it’s all for as we shall ever know—forever and ever. Nothing else is conceivable to the present power of the human mind. And so, old pal, you can think of me doing my apple sauce about the history of an inconsiderable planet that might any moment be

wiped out, history books and all, by some tiny cosmic slip. As for you, I shall be wishing you had a more persuasive Indian. On the flat, Sooner, you ought to get a real home dinger now that he needn't be even the gross caricature of myself that poor old George is. And that's life, Sooner. In your own phrase, that's what we're down against."

"Say, how long has this been going on?" my friend questioned, with another quaint stirring of curiosity.

"Forever—and for no time at all," I glibly told him. "Poor gulps such as you and I, do age, but life itself is timeless. Our tissues are wearing out, but the life in them isn't a second older than it was a myriad eons ago when that bounteous mane of yours existed only in its scattered chemical components and the banjo was a triumph of some unthinkable future. Does that satisfy you?"

"No, Al," he quickly replied, "it certainly does not satisfy me."

"Nor me, neither," I admitted. "But one has to say something."

"Say," he again demanded with this unfamiliar seriousness, "how far off is a star and why in h—l don't they all fall down?"

"I'm not certain myself," I frankly told him. "But there are books that guess, I believe with some shrewdness, about such matters."

"Well, how far could you go if you went right straight on past that there star"—he pointed carefully—"and kept on going and never did stop?"

"Write your own railway ticket," I jocosely told him. "I have seen something lately to the effect that space is

curved and finite, but any such conclusion is the sheerest puling. Of course if it were sound you couldn't possibly go straight on forever. But don't let it worry you, old beans, not for a moment. You have all those childish maunderers skinned handsomely by reason of a factor they have overlooked. Keep right on in a straight line past your star if you wish. It's splendid exercise and no one can hinder it. No matter what they prove about curved and limited space, they can't prevent you from imagining your absolutely straight line to infinity. And that simply makes yaps of them all. You destroy their flimsy premise. The poor old eggs have forgotten that the imagination transcends even the mathematics they worship."

"Goody!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad they ain't passed any law against the imagination yet. I'd sure be an outlaw if they did."

"They can never cheat you of that sole sign of your godhood nor of your endless straight lines," I told him. "They may curve space, but the poor gulps can't touch your lines if you wish to keep them straight, no matter with what subtle complexity the heavens are builded."

Now we fell silent for a time, Sooner no doubt busily extending his straight lines in either direction to infinity by virtue of that faculty which puts us above the puny trifling of mathematics, and I becoming more and more depressed by our parting, now so imminent. Yet after a bit we began to speak again.

And as we talked away the night, at times reverting to these quaintly awakened curiosities of my friend, at times content with gossiping retrospect, once I related to him the story of my nocturnal ride with the

wounded Joe, and to my horror I learned that I had actually served a scoundrel engaged in the illicit vending of alcoholic intoxicants. Aghast I truly was at this hideous disclosure, yet a moment later I found myself protesting that even if Joe were a rebel against our wise laws I was still glad I had brought him off. It was inevitable, I suppose, that my wild life in the underworld should have slackened certain old stringencies of view.

At last we both dozed, started awake to look at each other, then dozed again, and dawn was palely breaking when I finally opened my eyes to find Sooner putting fresh faggots on our declining fire. Lying there, I blinked myself alert to the chill consciousness that this errant self of mine must now be put by. Indeed, ever since parting from Jessup I had been once more Algeron Copplestone with a smug Ph.D., and no longer a specious Simms or a Montague known as The Fox. I a fox! But now I must even don the grayly respectable vestures of this feeble yet triumphing fellow. All I could do with that other frustrated self was to hide him away where he could mellow in a memory yet stubborn.

Sooner poured me coffee and spoke surprisingly of our business affairs, to which I had given no thought. To my amazement I now learned that, including a sum left from the original capital acquired in that contraband liquor affair, I had nearly a thousand dollars from my interest in our so-called medical show.

"But don't think I'm going to trust you with it, you poor whuff [one careless with berries]," he warned me. "I'll just turn it over to your Jekyll in town that

laughed to pieces one of the sweetest little medicine shows west of Pittsburgh."

"But I hope you get some more good specimens for your collection," I warmly assured him, adding in a burst of sheer humor, "You might send your old chief-tain a prettily skinned hide with the head mounted. We have one I invariably stumble over—in fact I have kicked several vacancies into its dental façade—but it's only a tiger. I own not one specimen of Iowa's remunerative fauna."

"Yea, bo! [yes, sir]" he replied. He had seen at once through my whimsical pretense. Both of us now joked above our bitter knowledge that we could no longer be side-kicks.

As I had lately pictured my old life placed in some far-gone epoch, so I had fancied myself a thousand leagues distant from Fairwater. Yet our journey back was very short. And I saw, too, that my sense of time had also been at fault; for, as I set down Jessup before his house, there passed a dingily tattered man bearing a sign upon his shoulders. It was unmistakably the sign I had once abandoned, and its bearer had seemingly not aged a day since I last observed him—asleep in the frayed hammock behind the already burning Lef-fingwell home. Doubtless he sought even now a vacant house so that he might make himself guiltily at ease.

Maple Avenue looked a bit faded and dusty as I came on to my own door, yet this was natural at the death of summer. As I stood to pay my cabman, Hubert Lef-fingwell came by, greeting me as if I had returned from a decorous vacation.

"We had a fire since you left," he naïvely volunteered as he shook my hand. "But our gallant fire laddies had it under control in no time. In fact, most of the damage was done by water."

It was easy to see the poor sap took a kind of sour pride in the occurrence. Plainly I had done him no great disservice. And while he spoke I noticed that a boy raked fallen leaves from his lawn. This was in no way a remarkable boy—except that he wore the suit I had left and his face hinted at discretion.

Then I went up the walk, aware of being furtively observed from a front window. Our door was ajar and I pushed it open, entered briskly, as one returning from a journey, set down my bag and turned to confront Mrs. Copplestone. She stood just within our drawing-room. The woman's attitude was a bit stiff, I thought, as if she had awaited me under some tension.

"Well, well, my dear, it's good to be back," I began—but I remembered something. "Did you know you forgot to put night things in that bag? I was not comfortable without them, I can assure you."

She stared blankly until I thought she could not have heard. I still think she did not, for she surged into a remarkable speech that was neither reasonable nor a reply.

"Algernon Copplestone"—her tone though passionate was low and grimly restrained—"I want you to know that for thirty years you have been a perfect devil to live with. No words of mine can do you justice. You have required the care an infant does, yet you have obstinately fought it until I've been ready again and again to give up and let you go to your own ruin. And

now, sir, if you think I haven't enjoyed your being off on this mad escapade just as much as you have, why, you are the most mistaken—most mistaken——”

In short, the woman's fundamentally better instincts prevailed and not any longer could she maintain her preposterous bravado. I was glad, indeed, to note our seclusion, for she now threw her arms about me with incoherent cries, being moved quite out of her normal statesmanlike calm, and to my astonishment I instantly suffered strange qualms of my own as I fell to consoling her with little pattings and meaningless exclamations that are not at all like me.

“This is no conduct for a mayor,” I at length told her in a humorous effort to quell the emotions that, I frankly say, now menaced my own dignity.

Yet it was some time before she regained even an approximation of her native calm and not for the remainder of that eventful day could I feel certain at any moment that she would be in valid possession of her really admirable faculties. It was Cato that brought our initial relief. He strolled imperiously to us and leaped to my shoulder, where he deigned to sit and purr.

“The brute seems no older,” I lightly remarked.

“I grew strangely fond of the poor deserted thing,” said Mrs. Copplestone, though with a catch in her voice, and she actually ran a hand along Cato's sleek side with something very like tenderness—I had been long enough gone for at least one momentous change to occur!

Presently we drew apart into that queer, watchful neutrality which characterized the first of those new days. Mrs. Copplestone wished to be told many things.

There were quite a number that I had no hesitation in telling her; yet not for a moment did I forget that I had come back to my tame bowl with a will of my own. Thus, when I sauntered about our yard that evening, my mind running over with memories of the past fortnight, she called from the doorway to warn me that the night air was cool and the grass wet from a recent shower—I must put on an overcoat and rubbers lest I catch a cold. It is true she made the suggestion with considerably less than her ancient arrogance, yet I thought it best to indicate that I was now capable of thinking for myself, and I strolled, unprotected, much longer than I had meant to. Unquestionably it was due to this additional exposure that I did contract the cold, but I considered my ensuing malaise cheap at the price. The poor gulp must be shown at any cost.

Constantly the underworld clutches me with its tentacles. Only the other day I came on three of our students trying their marksmanship at a game of dice in a shaded nook of the campus, and overwhelmed them with confusion by flinging down coins of my own with a challenge that they fade me out and shoot my works. Their first abashed reluctance was laughable; but at length, seeing me determined, they complied and we had some lively bouts with the hazardous cubes. For once I seemed to have lost my cunning and the rascals won rubber after rubber from me, despite my faithful use of prescribed incantations. Before we parted I was forced to stake the five-dollar bill only that morning pinned in an upper coat pocket by Mrs. Copplestone. This being lost in another hotly contested chukker, I was obliged to tell the lads they had cleansed me. They showed dis-

may at the avowal and promised me revenge at an early day. Undoubtedly there are subtleties in this sport that I have not yet justly appraised.

But I have shown that I am up to date at last, nor am I by any means done with proving it. Thus, I strongly dislike the grocer Mrs. Copplestone will insist on dealing with. Once I chanced to leave on his counter my Report of the Proceedings of the American Philological Society. I was certain it had been left there and no place else. Yet when I asked him for it three days later he gruffly declared he had not seen it, though I have not the slightest doubt the thing was securely in his own library at that very moment. Sometime soon, then, I dare say I shall play a joke on the chap that will cause him to remember clearly anything I should again chance to leave in his place. One need only take care to replace the labels on the wrong tins.

For a further proof that I have come abreast of the times, I may even decide to produce a sensation in my class by devoting an entire session to the dramatic tale of my friend, Sooner Calamity Jackson, and the life work to which he has dedicated himself to his own tremendous loss in mere dollars. Have I not learned that this, too, is history, possibly more vital to a new generation than the wars and struttings of long-dead kings?

In one thing I am happy. Mrs. Copplestone has been perturbed by rumors of the outrageous Mrs. Gale; she has brought to me certain reports of my association with New York's favorite emotional actress—that Vera of the stormy eyes—which called for quiet explanation. But no hint of that other—the woman vast, serene, witty and all-tolerant—has reached her. One

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golden memory, untouched, untarnished, I may keep for secret rejoicing. This is mine alone; no alien carping shall ever desecrate it. Often I shall think of the woman, something light and with wings!

THE END



